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PAUL GALLICO

Gulls and Ghosties



This phenomenally successful author marks his third appearance in Condensed Books with an article on the background of THE HAND OF MARY CONSTABLE.

MY NEW BOOK is set in the twilight world of mediums; it tells how a man who should have known better is duped and degraded by a cruel exploitation of the occult. You may wonder if it is credible that a brilliant scientist could be tricked like this. . . . The answer, if you look into the records of fifty to seventy-five years ago, is that scientists not only could be fooled, but were.

My interest in the subject began a long time ago, in the first decade of this century, the hey-day of the medium, of the ouija, table-tipping and "spirit photography." I was a boy of about eleven. An avid browser in the public library, I came across books on spiritualism, and first read about characters by the name of Eusapia Palladino and Madame Blavatsky. I was not impressed. Though not an especially religious boy, I doubted that when the dead returned they would occupy themselves with rattling tambourines, waving phosphorescent speaking trumpets, and visiting the back parlour seances of a group of illiterate old bags. Indeed, no one would have taken any of this farrago of nonsense seriously but for one fact: it had been investigated and vouched for as genuine by some of the leading scientists of the day.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge, and a number of men who were achieving miraculous scientific breakthroughs, set their seal of approval upon these frauds. They did this simply because outside their own specific fields many of them were the biggest gulls in the world. The care with which they conducted their own experiments, accepting only such results as had been proved beyond any shadow of

doubt, had left them with a curious blind side. Anything which *they* could not explain at once became supernatural.

To test the mediums, these men rigged up the most wonderful scientific contraptions, but never once did they take into consideration the fact that the hand is quicker than the eye. Further, they forgot that the foundation of stage magic lies in the art of misdirection, and that the men and women supposedly possessed of spiritual powers were adepts at every kind of trickery.

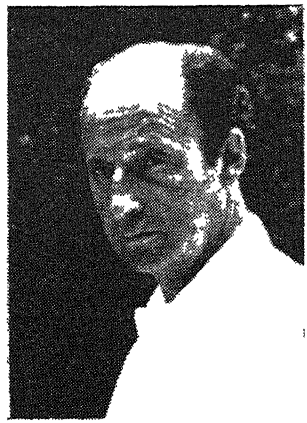
Eminent scientists actually had their pet mediums. Camille Flammarion, the astronomer, promoted Daniel Dunglas Home whose speciality was self-levitation, while Sir William Crookes, the great British chemist, patronized one Florence Cook. She furnished him with a spirit girl friend by the name of Katie King, who used to wander about the seance room in full illumination, available for a kiss and a cuddle and the application of an ear to her chest for the timing of her heart-beats. I have before me as I write this a photograph, taken by Sir William, of this very physical, well-built young lady emerging from a cabinet in a white cotton overall with something like a white duster on her head. A brief glance at this indicates how desperately the great scientist must have wanted to believe.

All this might have been written-off as good-natured fun except for the appalling use made of it by countless fake mediums. They perpetrated their horrid hoaxes upon the bereaved trying to reach their loved ones beyond the grave, and milked them of millions in fees.

Today, we are supposed to be wiser and more adult than half a century ago, but the fake mediums still ply their fetid trade in back parlours; few of them, if any, have submitted to being tested by the British and American Societies for Psychical Research, whose genuine researchers still pursue every clue for a real breakthrough into the world of the unknown; and most of them can still count scientists, doctors and clergymen among their prospects. As a child, I doubted their honesty. As a man, I have grown to loathe them. I have had more satisfaction writing this book than any other I have done for years.

DAVID WEISS

Artistic Heritage



DAVID WEISS's interest in artists such as Rodin, and his zestful ability to write about them, are his by inheritance. As his father was a painter, he gravitates naturally to art galleries; as his mother was a writer, his literary teeth were cut on the works of the great English storytellers—Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Hardy. These strong, life-loving novelists left their stamp on him; his idols are not among the school of cross and dispirited modern writers, but rather among the names enshrined in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

And yet his career is a model of contemporary unorthodoxy. He graduated from university in his native Philadelphia during the depth of the depression. Jobs were catch-as-catch-can, and he caught about fifty. He was, among other things, an athletics coach, a stevedore, a welfare worker, a social director at holiday hotels, an actor.

From acting in plays it was only a step to writing them, but Weiss discovered that a trainee-playwright could not expect a high income. When he met his future wife he turned to the film industry, and as a screen-play editor he wrote scripts and screen treatments of novels.

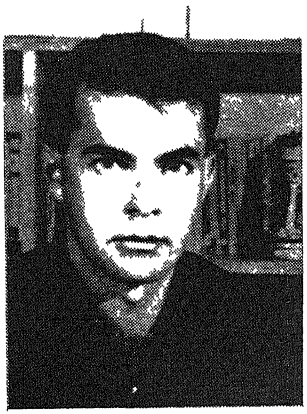
By learning to work very fast at this demanding job, he managed to turn out four novels in his spare moments. He also found time nearly every day for three hard sets of tennis and a vigorous swim—which he still thinks is the best way to work off fatigue and tensions. The last novel he wrote during his film period was *The Spirit and the Flesh*, the story of Isadora Duncan, the great dancer who was at one time Rodin's friend and neighbour. The best-selling *Naked Came I* appeared next.

Weiss and his wife, who is a poet and a painter, live and work in New York. They both like to travel, and he has a particular fondness

for Britain. His only complaint has to do with "all that rain." On one visit, he says rather plaintively, the dampness warped his tennis racket before he could play a single game. He expects to come over to see the Wimbledon tennis this year, and sandwich sports events between stints of research for a biographical novel about Whistler. Then his ambition is to visit each of the fifteen countries where Reader's Digest Condensed Books are published. E.G.

WILBUR SMITH

Model for a Hero



WHEN WILBUR SMITH came to London for the hectic launching of *When the Lion Feeds* (from which *Gold Fever* is taken), it was his first visit to Britain and an introduction to a way of life markedly different from his own.

At home in Southern Rhodesia he pursues a relatively solitary life—("I feel jealous and possessive if I find car tracks less than a year old"); in London, traffic and people jostled him unceasingly. In Rhodesia, Smith prefers the company of a few friends to the social whirl; in London, party followed party as his publishers gave him the sort of reception that befits a rising literary figure.

But Smith managed to preserve his characteristic friendliness and refreshing informality through the round of celebrations. He answered questions with disarming modesty. He had, he said, no formula for writing best-sellers. "I just take some people and put them in a certain situation—and then the characters dictate the plot." It sounded simple, but Wilbur Smith is aware that the essence of good novel writing is to

know when to stop; to tell the reader just enough about a person or a place, but not enough to slow up the action. He admitted that he found writing easy. Ideas come to him easily and he is never at a loss for a plot.

Researching *When the Lion Feeds* was apparently no problem either; Smith had a vivid mental picture of the South African gold rush from stories told him by his grandfather, who had actually carried supplies to Witwatersrand. Smith's extensive reading and his own way of life—his childhood on a Rhodesian cattle ranch, and his knowledge of business—give the novel further authenticity. "But it's not historical," he says. "It just happens that the kind of men in my novel don't exist any more, so it had to be set in the gold rush days. Nostalgic? Yes—I should like to have lived then. There's no place today for individual men; it's all big companies now."

Like his own heroes, Smith has always had a talent for romantic and colourful escapades. He was born at Broken Hill, Northern Rhodesia, in 1933, the son of a prosperous engineer and rancher. At school in Natal, he captained the shooting and cross-country running teams. At Rhodes University, he distinguished himself by being sent to hospital three times in one term because of motor-cycle crashes. After he graduated (in an unlikely subject—commerce) he worked on a fishing-boat, until an extra-heavy catch, combined with failure of the pumps, left him swimming for his life.

When he married, Smith joined the sales department of his father's engineering firm—work which he disliked. Then he started to write seriously; he had always wanted to be a writer and, besides editing the school magazine, he had contributed to school and university magazines since the age of nine. He soon sold several short stories to magazines and to the B.B.C.

Then one short story got out of hand. Smith found himself so caught up with the characters that he decided to expand it into a novel. Two and a half years later he completed *When the Lion Feeds*. He sent it to London and within ten days—almost a record for an unknown author—he received a cable announcing its acceptance by Heinemann. It was his most exciting moment.

After his reception in London, when the literary world launched the book on its road to success, and two film companies were battling for the contract, Wilbur Smith went home to start work on a sequel to *When the Lion Feeds*—another breath of the great outdoors which its author loves so much. A.H.

DICK FRANCIS *A Loser's Comeback*

In 1956 it seemed likely that Dick Francis would always be known as the man who didn't win the Grand National. Many readers will remember that tragic day at Aintree when he rode the Queen Mother's horse, Devon Loch. He landed first by several lengths over the last fence and winning seemed a certainty. But 50 yards from the post Devon Loch collapsed and was unable to continue the race. The reason the horse fell is still a mystery.

But through that personal tragedy Dick Francis has achieved fame in a totally different sphere—as a writer of thrillers with a steeplechasing background.

In 1957, when a fall forced him to retire from steeplechasing, he was persuaded by a literary agent—a close friend of his—to write his autobiography while the story of Devon Loch was still fresh in people's minds. There was plenty of material. In ten years of steeplechasing, Francis had achieved nearly every distinction open to a "jumping jockey"; he had ridden innumerable winners for Lord Bicester and the Queen Mother, and had been Champion Steeplechase Jockey for 1953/4. So, with his racing career at an end, he produced *The Sport of Queens*.

Much to his own surprise, the book was a great success. The *Sunday Express* published extracts and then asked the ex-jockey to become their racing correspondent. To his delight he found that even out of the saddle he could remain on the racing scene, and he now spends eleven months of the year travelling all over the country to race meetings and to training stables.

Novel-writing is his other occupation. Francis has always admired and enjoyed crime and suspense novels; he has also found that the few



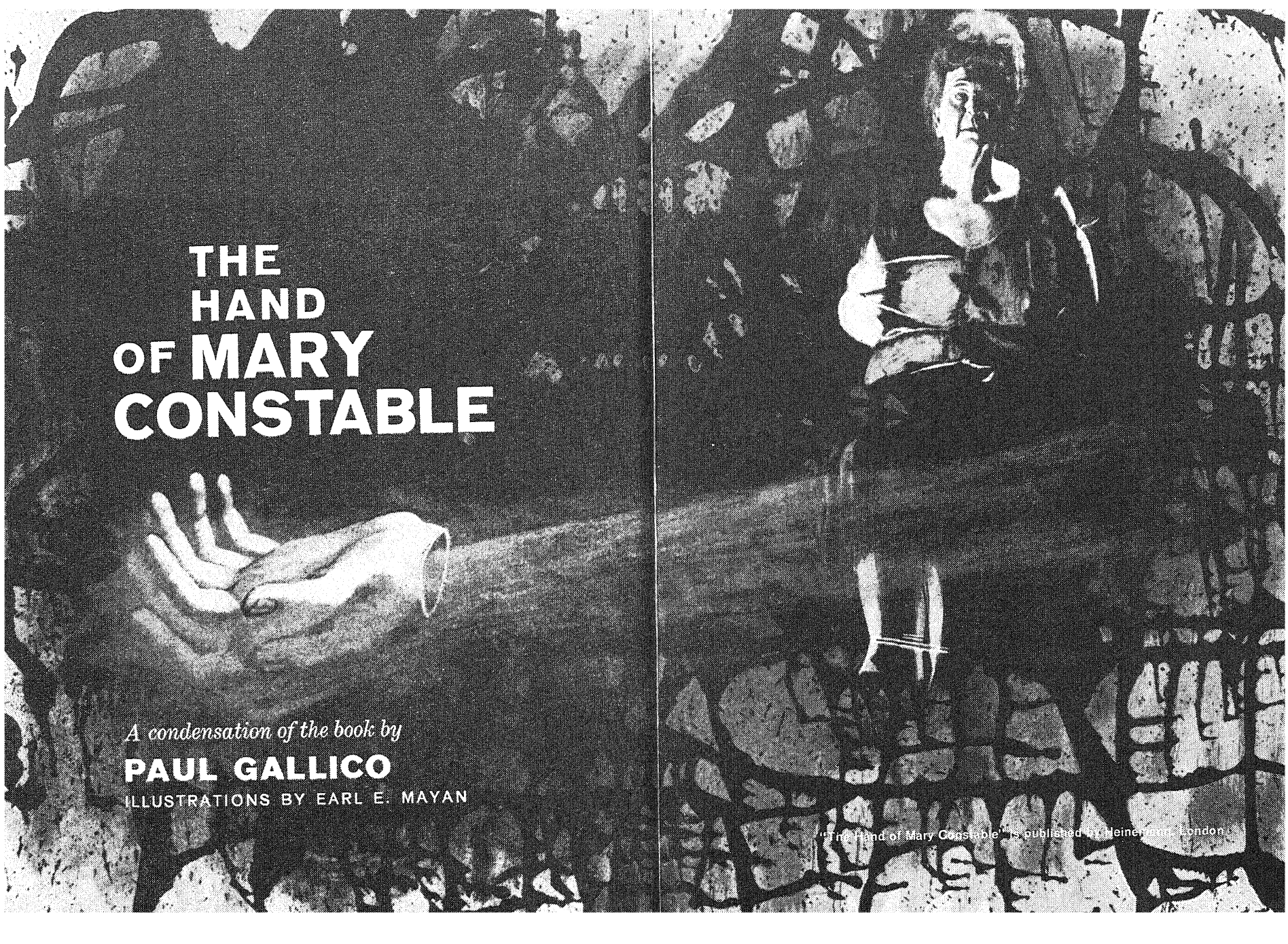
books with racing backgrounds are usually factually inaccurate. When his agent suggested that he should write a suspense novel, Francis saw a chance to indulge his passion for facts and authenticity by depicting an accurate steeplechasing background. The result was *Dead Cert*, which was an immediate success. *Nerve* is his second thriller and every paragraph shows the author's special knowledge of horses and racing.

There will be many more books; Francis says that there is plenty of material in the racing world. He thinks up plots during the long drives to race meetings, often with the help of his wife. When a plot has taken shape, Mrs. Francis, who is full of enthusiasm for her husband's new career, does the research while he gets down to the hard job of writing. After months of careful planning, he takes about six months to write a book.

Francis and his wife and two sons live in a house which they built themselves, near the training stables in Berkshire where he was First Jockey for many years. He still rides out with the string each morning, schools horses over fences, judges at horse shows and hunts when he can.

It is when he is on horseback that this charming and unassuming man is most likely to admit that he would have preferred victory on Devon Loch in that great race to all his success as a writer. Readers of *Nerve* will beg to differ.

E.M.



"The Hand of Mary Constable" is published by Heinemann, London

THE HAND was of wax, translucent, a perfect copy of his dead daughter's hand. For Samuel Hale Constable, a brilliant scientist employed on a top secret project, it was positive proof that his daughter's spirit lived on. Yet only at the seances of the sinister medium, Mother Bessmer, could he hear his child's voice.

When Mary Constable's spirit starts subtly to influence the bereaved father, a dangerous plot menacing the entire free world begins to unfold. An urgent call goes out for Alexander Hero, foremost British expert in the field of psychical research. As he penetrates the mystery surrounding the hand of Mary Constable the reader is taken on an eerie journey into a bizarre world of spies and spiritualism.

"His plot is compelling . . . and the total effect highly enjoyable." —*The Daily Telegraph*

"It is certainly Gallico's best book."
—*The Bookman*

Chapter 1

THE PASSENGER in the seat in front of him was jiggling a sheet of paper in the face of Alexander Hero, investigator for the Society for Psychical Research of Great Britain. It roused him from a doze.

Hero reached for the paper. It was another message from the captain of the B.O.A.C. jet airliner advising passengers of altitude, air and ground speed, whereabouts, and estimated time of arrival in New York: eight o'clock in the morning.

Hero adjusted his seat from reclining to sitting up. Then, with a careful tongue-tip he probed the temporary filling in the lower-left rear molar which his London dentist had been trying to save. It was like having an unexploded bomb in his mouth.

"I don't think she'll blow up," he had said, "but if she does, you've got Dr. Hofstetter's address in New York."

Instinctively Hero reached under the seat to touch his brief-case, containing the address of the American dentist. He had had one or two sleepless nights from the thing and wanted no more.

He shifted the brief-case to his lap, unsnapped the catch, produced and re-read the letter which had led him to leave behind in London unfinished laboratory experiments and the proofs of his book *Evidence*

in the Occult, a study of the collapse of human intelligence and reliability when giving evidence concerning supernatural phenomena.

The letter was from Dr. Frank Ferguson, president of the American branch of the Society for Psychical Research. It was written on the letter-head of the Department of Ancient Oriental Manuscripts of the New York Public Library, of which Ferguson was the chief curator.

With its stilted style, the letter re-created the picture in his mind of the courtly, old-fashioned septuagenarian who had written it. And there was no mistaking the urgency that came through the fine, Spenserian handwriting.

The letter read:

My dear Hero,

May I recall myself to you as being an ardent admirer of your work, and the recipient of your generous hospitality upon the occasion of my last visit to London.

I wonder whether we could persuade you to come here and give us the benefit of your knowledge and experience. There has been a number of occurrences, the implications of which are so far-reaching and so potentially dangerous that they have engaged our Government at its highest level. I suspect they would also be of concern to yours. Added to this, there is a personal involvement which is most distressing. It would not be possible to over-estimate the seriousness of the situation.

More than this I am not permitted to confide to paper, but we need your help, my dear fellow. We need it *badly*.

If you can see your way to postpone the important work upon which I know you must be engaged and fly over to consult with us, you would be placing us greatly in your debt. Needless to say, your expenses and anything you might care to name in the way of a fee are guaranteed. A cabled reply would greatly relieve us all.

Yours very sincerely,
Frank Ferguson

Hero remembered Dr. Ferguson as a tall, cultured old gentleman, who wore a gold pince-nez attached to a black ribbon. When he had been in London he had paid several visits to Hero's laboratory and had studied the apparatus developed by Hero for testing claims put forward by spiritualistic mediums. He had greatly admired the subtlety of the snares Hero had devised to trip humans who had been tempted to play spook.

The hostess, threading her way down the aisle with the last of the breakfast trays, paused for an instant to look down upon the passenger. She thought he was "smashing." His mouth was sensual yet humorous above a firm and stubborn chin. She would have liked to run her fingers through the cockscomb of light brown hair The hostess sighed and moved on down the aisle.

Alexander Hero (the name was a variant of the French Huguenot Heureux) had established a practice as a private detective of the occult. He was a ghost-breaker, an occupation which called for a thorough grounding in normal and abnormal psychology, physics, chemistry, photography and sleight-of-hand. A seeker after the truth in the often dangerous regions of the paranormal, he had to keep an open mind free from superstition, and be a judge of human nature. He was as eager for genuine proof of a life in the hereafter as he was active in destroying the charlatans of spiritualism who preyed upon the bereaved and ignorant.

As he speculated on what might lie behind Dr. Ferguson's urgent summons, the intercom came to life with the announcement: "We are now beginning our descent and will land at Kennedy Airport within twenty minutes. Please fasten your seat belts. . . ."

Before entering the approach path to Kennedy the pilot flew close to the city. Looking down at this forest of tall buildings, spires and towers bathed in morning light, Hero thought that it was too grandiose for man—and certainly for ghosts, or the spirits of the dead. The aircraft banked and turned east towards the glide path to the airport.

There was no one at the airport to meet Hero. An immigration official stamped his passport. A young cheerful customs inspector made a perfunctory pass at his opened suit-case and, coming upon a small black tube, asked, "What's that?"

"Sniperscope," Hero replied. "Your chaps used them in Korea. As a matter of fact, that one was made in America."

"What's it for?"

"To see in the dark."

"Well, I'll be darned!" The customs man waved him through.

Hero took a cab and gave the driver the address of the hotel where Ferguson had reserved accommodation for him. At the hotel, he was

shown to a fabulous suite, and, when the bell-boy had left, opened a note which had been handed to him at the desk.

> We shall be waiting for you at my office. Come over when you are settled in. F. F.

Hero had a shower, shaved, changed his clothes and proceeded to the New York Public Library.

DR. FERGUSON met Hero at the door of his office, which was almost under the eaves of the huge white building at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. He looked exactly as Hero had remembered him: quiet, urbane, dressed in country tweeds and holding a pince-nez attached to a black ribbon round his neck.

"My dear fellow, how very good of you to come," he said. "Inexcusable not to meet you at the airport. Do accept our apologies." A circular wave of the pince-nez took in the men Hero could see over his shoulder, sitting at a long table, one in military uniform, the other two civilians.

He was ushered in and the three men arose to greet him. Dr. Ferguson said, "May I present General Walter Augstadt, Mr. Saul Wiener and Mr. John Ferris. Mr. Wiener is the regional director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the metropolitan area and Mr. Ferris is an F.B.I. finger-print expert. Gentlemen, Mr. Alexander Hero."

The three men nodded grudgingly. The atmosphere was one of suspicion and hostility. Dr. Ferguson showed Hero to a chair at his left and seated himself at the head of the table.

Hero, still somewhat fuzzy from the trip, pulled himself together and concentrated upon learning what he could from these varied and antagonistic men.

The General was huge, with enormous shoulders, a great square head, and not much neck between. An American would have classified him as a full-back and would have been right, for in his youth the General had bullied and crashed his way to a record number of touchdowns for West Point. The set of his jaw marked him as a doer. Subtlety would not be his strong point.

Quickly, too, Hero got his impression of the young man introduced

as Ferris. His interest would be his speciality. He seemed to be waiting to take his cue from his superiors.

It was Saul Wiener, occupying a chair at Dr. Ferguson's left, who impressed Hero the most. He looked exactly like an American Indian, bar his colour. He had a crown of glistening, black hair that grew almost like a scalp-lock, a thin, hatchet face and a great beak of a nose. His inquisitive dark eyes were giving Hero a thorough going-over. There was a sardonic quality to his lively, intelligent expression.

Hero was drawn to him, yet he wondered whether in him he would find friend or foe.

Dr. Ferguson had finished riffling through a pile of folders. He put on his pince-nez, took them off again, hunched himself into a more relaxed attitude and said, "Well, gentlemen, let us begin by asking Mr. Hero whether the name Samuel Hale Constable means anything to him."

Hero reflected a moment. "Cybernetics," he said.

The heads of those sitting round the table suddenly jerked in his direction as though they had been pulled with string.

Dr. Ferguson nodded. "Now let me ask you this: Have you ever heard of Operation Foxglove?"

"No."

The General looked relieved. Dr. Ferguson said, "We hoped you had not." He lifted his pince-nez towards the group—"Have I your permission?"—and collected a series of grudging half nods.

He continued. "Professor Constable, the head of the Department of Cybernetics in the advanced engineering school at Columbia University, is internationally acknowledged as the greatest expert in the field of communication and control mechanisms of machines and living creatures. Here is a photograph of him." Ferguson handed a glossy print to Hero.

It was a lion's head with a mane of bushy, grey hair, bulging brow and small, intense eyes. The chin was ample and stubborn, the whole attitude was aggressive.

Dr. Ferguson went on: "Operation Foxglove is the application and development by the Department of Defence of a recent theory by Professor Constable. It has been given a number-one priority by

the President of the United States. General Augstadt is in charge of Operation Foxglove which is top secret. Its nature will not be discussed at this meeting. Am I right, General?"

Augstadt replied belligerently, "You bet you are."

Dr. Ferguson continued: "Professor Constable is conducting his experiments at his Columbia laboratory, which the Defence Department as well as the F.B.I. has made as nearly impregnable as possible from the point of view of security. But I might add," and here a curiously innocent expression came into his mild blue eyes, "Professor Constable is a problem child."

The snort from Wiener testified that this was probably the understatement of the year. He spoke up. "It is only fair to point out that at the time Professor Constable consented to become part of Operation Foxglove his past, his antecedents, his habits and his associations were thoroughly investigated by my department and nothing whatsoever against him was turned up."

"Operation Foxglove began more than a year ago," Dr. Ferguson said, "and has continued uninterruptedly, despite the fact that three months after starting on it Constable suffered a shattering blow. His only daughter, then aged ten, was discovered to be suffering from leukaemia and died shortly after." He handed another photograph to Hero. "This is a picture of Mary Constable."

Hero felt touched by the photograph. Mary Constable was a lovely little girl with hair falling to her shoulders, nose freckled across the bridge, a gentle mouth. The photograph showed that the child's eyes were brimming with intelligence and the joy of living. It must have been very hard to lose her.

How hard, Dr. Ferguson was explaining. Professor Constable and his wife, Jane, had been childless for many years. She had been forty and he fifty-seven when their daughter had been born. As the children of older parents often are, Mary was a charming, talented, intelligent child. She became the focal point of her father's life. Her illness and death had left him desolate, a changed man. He had sufficient strength of character to avoid going to pieces; he maintained an interest in his work and the project, but life had gone out of him.

Then Ferguson proceeded to explain the security problem.

Constable had refused to submit to the isolation demanded by the Government of a scientist working upon a secret project. He refused to live in a closely guarded compound, as many of the atom scientists and their families did. So, with the consent of Washington, the heavy task of guarding Constable and Operation Foxglove had been entrusted to Augstadt, Wiener and their staffs. Constable, before the death of his child, had been gregarious and life-loving. He had enjoyed art, music, the theatre and the company of friends, and would brook no interference with his usual way of life. If they wanted Constable for Operation Foxglove they had to take him on his terms.

General Augstadt shifted his chair noisily and said, "If I had my way with the son of a gun . . ." then held himself in check.

What were they all driving at? Hero wondered.

"This attitude of Constable's," continued Dr. Ferguson, "has placed a burden upon these gentlemen, to put it mildly. Constable warned them against any interference in his affairs, threatening to resign if he felt himself restricted in any way. This naturally has not prevented Army Intelligence and the F.B.I. from maintaining checks upon his movements. It has thus come to their attention that for the past four months Professor Constable has been attending spiritualist seances. He is convinced that he has made contact with his dead child."

Hero now knew why he had been summoned, though not yet of the urgency or the danger.

Chapter 2

"VOICE CONTACT or physical?" Hero asked. All heads turned towards him. Dr. Ferguson regarded him over the top of his pince-nez as he replied, "Both. Professor Constable has heard a voice purporting to be that of his daughter, and seen and been in physical contact with a figure which he believes to be a materialization of her."

General Augstadt snorted in disgust.

Hero asked, "Who is the medium?"

Ferguson consulted one of his dossiers. "A Mrs. Sarah Bessmer, who operates in conjunction with her husband, Arnold Bessmer. The woman is a trance, voice and materialization medium whose other

specialities are psychometry, clairvoyance, clairaudience, slate-writing, table-tipping and the production of ectoplasm."

Dr. Ferguson added, "She has also seen the inside of several jails for brief periods. The Bessmers came originally from Los Angeles, where they conducted a spiritualist church. They moved to New York some eight months ago and leased a house off Central Park West in the Nineties. Sitters are accepted only after reference by someone known to the Bessmers, plus an interview with the prospective client."

Hero murmured, "Always useful, that."

"Their seances are limited to three evenings a week, with twelve to fourteen sitters. The Bessmers are highly regarded in spiritualist circles here. They number among their clients several members of the Society for Psychical Research."

Augstadt uttered one scathing word: "Clowns!"

"Four months ago," Dr. Ferguson continued, "Professor Constable received word that the Bessmers had a message for him from someone on the 'other side.'"

"How was this communicated to him?" Hero inquired.

"Through one of our Society's members," Dr. Ferguson replied. "Mr. Charles Woodmanston."

"A supposedly harmless idiot," Wiener said. "My pigeon."

"He is a bachelor," Dr. Ferguson said, "a man of about my age. He managed to see Professor Constable and gave him a message supposedly from his daughter Mary. It contained some nursery reference which the professor believed was known only to his family. His curiosity was aroused. He was in torment over the loss of his child, so he agreed to go to a seance. Mrs. Constable refused, so Professor Constable went with Mr. Woodmanston and received a message. Still sceptical, he went again, and then again, because Mrs. Bessmer was apparently able to produce the dead child's voice through her controls. Constable was wavering. Then he received what he considered positive proof of his daughter's return."

Hero asked, "What was it?"

Dr. Ferguson sighed. "The hand of Mary Constable," he said.

"What do you mean?" cried Hero.

"The girl's hand was cast in wax and perfect in every detail,"

Dr. Ferguson explained. "During the seance, the person of the dead child ostensibly materialized. A bowl of liquid wax had been prepared and another of cold water. The materialized spirit said, 'I am with you again, Daddy. Believe in me. I have come back because I love you. To help you to trust me I will leave you my hand.' The materialized spirit thrust her hand into the bowl of wax, then into the cold water.

"Afterwards, Professor Constable felt his forehead brushed by a kiss and everyone heard the words whispered in a child's voice, 'Good-bye, Daddy. I'll come again. Trust me.' When the lights went up, there, on the table, was the transparent hand and wrist of a child, the fingers curled in an attitude of supplication. Professor Constable broke down and wept."

"Was there any light during the manifestation?" Hero asked. "Or did it occur in darkness?"

"Total darkness."

"From whose notes are you quoting?"

"Mr. Woodmanston's. He writes down everything he sees and hears at the seances."

"Or thinks he sees and hears," Hero said. His mind was playing like the flickering of heat lightning round the production of the wax cast. Sixty years ago, no less a personage than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had seen such a hand and believed that it was cast from the hand of a spirit. The essential problem was, if a human hand were dipped into wax which was allowed to harden, it would be impossible to withdraw it without breaking the cast. But a spirit hand . . . ?

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had been hoaxed with a crude substitution of an already prepared cast. Hero asked, "Have you a photograph of the hand?"

There was something chilling about the gravity and heaviness with which Dr. Ferguson handed him four glossy prints.

"Woodmanston persuaded Professor Constable to permit this hand, which is kept under glass in his home, to be photographed for the archives of the Society for Psychical Research," he said.

The photographs showed a delicate wax cast of the hand of a child, the palm and the fingers half curled, a loving hand from the other side reaching out to one who had remained behind. As Hero examined the

photographs he felt a thrill of dread and apprehension. He closely scrutinized a print which showed the hand, palm and fingers towards the camera. Dr. Ferguson pushed a small magnifying glass over towards him.

Hero focused it on the photograph. Faint but unmistakable, there were fine lines, loops and whorls at the tips of the thumb and fingers.

Hero cried, "Those are her finger-prints?" He could hear the thumping of his heart.

Dr. Ferguson replied, "Yes, I am afraid they are."

Augstadt bawled: "They can't be! It's impossible!"

"They match up," Ferris said. "There's no doubt about it. We have on file the finger-prints of the entire family of anyone who accepts a Government job involving top security. We have checked and double-checked. These are Mary Constable's finger-prints."

Hero again examined the photograph with the lens. "Are they on the inside or the outside?" he asked. "It's not clear——"

"On the inside of the transparent wax cast."

A thought flashed through Hero's mind which made him recoil with horror. He glanced at Dr. Ferguson.

The old man met his gaze. "I know what you are thinking, but it won't wash. Mary Constable's body was cremated two days after her death. Do you wonder that Professor Constable is convinced of the life-after-death survival of his child?"

General Augstadt burst forth angrily, "How could an egghead like Constable go for that kind of rot? A *scientist*?"

Hero turned to Augstadt. "Have you ever attended a seance?"

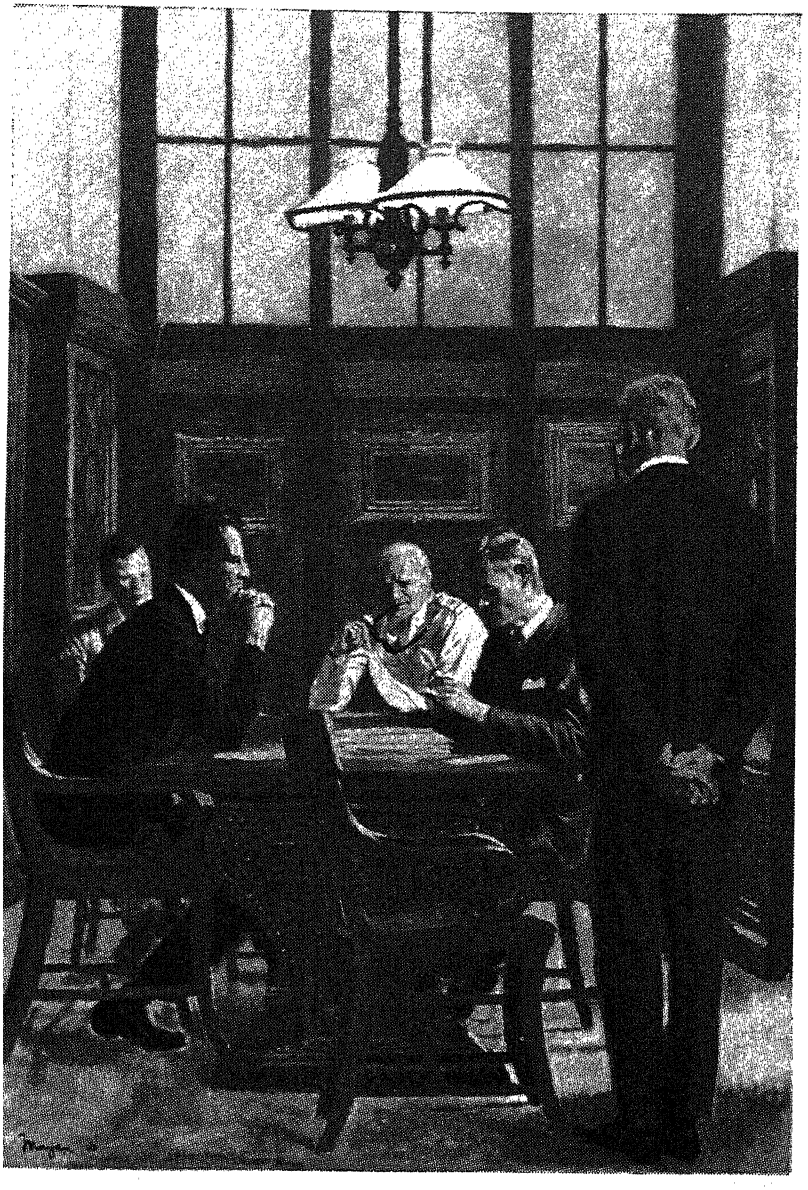
Augstadt glared and said contemptuously, "I wouldn't be caught dead at one!"

Wiener's yell of glee broke the tension and soon they were all, except the General, shouting with laughter.

When the laughter subsided, Dr. Ferguson picked up the photographs and stacked them. He said to Hero, "Could you reproduce this phenomenon under the same circumstances as the Bessmers' seance?"

Hero replied, "I could not, at the moment."

"Neither can we," said Dr. Ferguson. "Do you think you might be able to devise a way?"



"Perhaps. I should want to attend several seances at the Bessmers' and study the situation. If given time"

"Exactly," Ferguson agreed, "but unfortunately there is very little time. Mr. Woodmanston's diary will show you the danger of the situation." He drew some papers from a portfolio. "You gentlemen are familiar with these thirty-nine messages purported to have been spoken by Mary Constable, and I will turn them over to Mr. Hero for study.

"I suggest to him that anyone of intelligence reading these messages consecutively will be forced to suspect that a powerful intellect is in the process of taking over the mind of Professor Constable, preparing him either to sell out the secret of Operation Foxglove or to defect with it. The messages proceed with subtlety, leading him on step by step. One thing is certain: from wherever they have emanated, they are far beyond the scope of the Bessmers."

"Lord!" breathed Hero.

"You heard the message at the time the hand was first produced, begging her father to trust and love her. This line was continued for a time, along with physical manifestations in which Professor Constable was caressed by a small creature seen in dim red light. She, however, forbade him to touch her. Professor Constable came regularly to these seances for a rendezvous with his lost daughter. I might add that he is charged a stiffish fee."

Hero murmured, "You are more inclined to believe what you have to pay for."

Dr. Ferguson nodded. "Exactly. After a month, the tenor of the messages begins to change. Mary is no longer so happy on the other side. The state of the world and its tensions troubles her. Here, for instance, is a plea aimed at the father's heart: 'What you are doing is making me sad, Daddy. You always said you would do anything to make me happy. Good-bye, Daddy. I will try to come and see you again, if They will let me.' "

"Bloody," said Hero, half under his breath.

"The next time she returns, the tune changes. 'They' do not wish her to come to her father because he is doing something that will make things worse in the world and cause suffering. This campaign is intensified. It constantly sows doubts in his mind about his work. His child,

restored to him by a miracle, now threatens to withdraw from him, or be withdrawn by 'Them,' to be lost for ever in the limbo beyond the farthest galaxies." Dr. Ferguson peered over his glasses. "You know, this man has contributed to communication with satellites whirling millions of miles away through space. The picture of his daughter exiled to this awful void might be very real."

Hero turned to General Augstadt and said, "Have you noticed any difference in Professor Constable's attitude towards his work?"

"We have," the General said. "But do we have to listen to all this baloney? Why don't we just enter the house, clean the lot of them out, and bring Constable to his senses?"

Dr. Ferguson ignored Augstadt. He said to Hero, "Fortunately, I have managed to persuade these gentlemen that they must be patient. Any attempt to break up Professor Constable's supposed contact with his daughter would lose him to us. It would be the end of Operation Foxglove."

General Augstadt said bitterly, "And if he gives it away to the Russians it'll be the end of the free world."

That sentence trembled before them like a flashing of doom, but Dr. Ferguson merely waved his spectacles at Hero, and said mildly, "You see, my dear boy, you have quite a problem on your hands."

THE MEETING broke up on the grudging acquiescence of those present that Hero should be given the opportunity to investigate the Bessmer seances. They had been compelled to admit that an ordinary F.B.I. operative was not competent to judge what was going on. Hero was the most experienced investigator of occult phenomena on both sides of the Atlantic. A covering story was arranged for him so that he could pursue his work unhampered.

In the meantime the army and the F.B.I. would continue close surveillance of Constable's movements and take all precautions possible. As a safety measure Hero was to report regularly to Wiener by telephone and to call on Wiener should there be any developments he felt were beyond him. This last condition, Hero had no doubt, amounted to a vote of no confidence. Yet for the moment there was nothing else they could do.

Dr. Ferguson and Hero were alone now in Ferguson's office. "Sam Constable has been my friend for thirty years," Ferguson said. "If I had let Wiener and Augstadt break up the seances, as they wanted to do when they first learned of them, they would have destroyed him. That is why I sent for you."

A secretary appeared at the door. "Mr. Woodmanston is here, Dr. Ferguson."

"Ask him to be so kind as to wait." When the door had closed Dr. Ferguson continued, "I want you to find out whether the Bessmers are frauds, and to find out if you can the source of the messages from Mary Constable. Above all, produce a duplicate of the hand under the same conditions as the Bessmers have done. For that, my dear boy, is the only way we shall bring Constable back to sanity."

Hero said, "You will leave the matter in my hands, no matter who may be hurt, including Constable?"

Ferguson said, "Yes. I don't want Constable hurt. But I have no choice but to trust you. Are you satisfied with your cover as I have outlined it?"

"Yes."

"Very well, I will present the broad picture and leave it to you to do the embroidery." He pressed a buzzer and the secretary appeared with Woodmanston.

Charles Woodmanston moved into the room like a dancing master. He was a sparrow of a man, dressed in a style gone out half a century before. He had shoe-button eyes and a small, dark, spiked moustache, obviously dyed. His thinning hair, carefully parted in the middle, was white.

In the seance rooms of London, Hero had met his British counterparts. Well-to-do dilettantes, with nothing to occupy their bird brains, they were the spiritualists' favourite pigeons, and the source of most of the information gleaned by the mediums and later fed to astonished clients.

Dr. Ferguson said, "Charles, may I present a friend from London, Peter Fairweather." He used Hero's cover name.

Woodmanston said he was charmed and Dr. Ferguson added, "Peter lectures on applied psychology at Cambridge."

"How exciting," said Mr. Woodmanston.

"I have asked you here to meet Peter because we have a favour to beg of you."

Mr. Woodmanston swelled importantly. "My dear Frank, you have only to name it."

Dr. Ferguson motioned them into chairs saying to Woodmanston, "I am afraid this recital is going to be rather painful to my friend. Mr. Fairweather has recently suffered a great personal bereavement."

Mr. Woodmanston's face lit up as though a battery of lights had been turned on as Dr. Ferguson launched into his story.

For more than a year, he said, Peter Fairweather had been engaged to marry one of his own students, an attractive girl called Ruth Lesley. Since Fairweather had an independent fortune, there had been nothing to interfere with their marriage. But before it was to take place, just six weeks ago, Miss Lesley was stricken with a cerebral haemorrhage and within twenty-four hours was dead.

Her fiancé came very near to losing his reason. When he had somewhat recovered from the shock, he found he was no longer able to continue his work in surroundings which reminded him of his loss, asked for leave of absence, and came to the United States in an effort to forget.

"Peter has had several extraordinary experiences," Dr. Ferguson continued, "which led him to consult me in my capacity as the head of our Society. Peter, would you care to go on from here, if you feel up to it?"

Hero was seated, his hands folded between his knees, staring blankly ahead. It took two or three seconds before Ferguson's words aroused him. He appeared to be still stumbling through a fog as he said, "The dream I had. It was too vivid—she was there in the room—she spoke to me. It was as though she had come back." His face was etched into bleak lines of misery.

"And then the feeling that she is somewhere close by. . . . She couldn't simply have disappeared—so much love, so much of *her*, to be wiped out overnight with nothing remaining. If she is trying to reach me——"

Hero broke off and looked at the two others as though he had just discovered them. He said, "I do apologize. I am behaving like a bloody fool."

Mr. Woodmanston had been exchanging knowing glances with Dr. Ferguson. He said to Fairweather, "My dear sir, we understand you well. There *is* help for you." He looked to Ferguson, and made his hand into the shape of the hand of Mary Constable. "Does he know about . . . ?"

"Yes," replied Dr. Ferguson. "He does. I was hoping, perhaps, I might persuade you"

"Of course, of course." The little man was aglow with excitement. "He must attend a seance. I am sure the Bessmers will accept him and that he will get results. Would Mr. Fairweather consent to being interviewed by Mr. Bessmer?"

Hero said, "I'll do anything. Can they really help? Will they be able to let me through to her?"

Woodmanston's neck stretched inside his high, stiff collar. "One can never *promise* but I can testify from the evidence of my own eyes and ears to the marvels they have achieved. You shall see for yourself. I may perhaps be able to arrange an interview this very afternoon. I'll leave word here at Dr. Ferguson's office."

He threw them both a look of triumphal confidence. "Be of good cheer, Mr. Fairweather, you can be helped!" He clapped his hat on his head and departed.

THE HOUSE on West 91st Street was a three-story brownstone as like its neighbours in the block as peas in a pod. It had a tall flight of steps up to a glass-panelled front door giving on to inner double doors. There was also a basement entrance through an area with access through a grilled iron gate. At five minutes to four that afternoon, Hero pushed the door-bell to keep the appointment Woodmanston had arranged for him. There was an appreciable wait before the door was opened by a manservant. It was dark and gloomy inside the hall. The man was stocky and powerfully built. He wore dark trousers and a white coat.

Hero gave his name and said he had an appointment.

The man said, "Wait in the parlour," indicating the room with a gesture and shuffling off down the hall.

The old-fashioned parlour was depressing. The furniture was red plush, darkened by age and dirt. There was a marble mantelpiece over

a fake fire-place. Two large rubber plants added the dark of their shiny leaves to the gloom. There was a bookcase, but before Hero could inspect the books Arnold Bessmer strode into the room with his hand outstretched. "Mr. Fairweather!"

His voice was extraordinarily deep, like the bass note of an organ. He was tall, vigorous, heavy-jawed, with compelling dark eyes. The mouth was like a woman's, softly shaped. He was as repellent to Hero as a reptile, yet the deep voice and the sombre, magnetic eyes had a curious appeal. Hero was certain that this man was no fool. Not for one second must Alexander Hero think of himself as anyone but Peter Fairweather, in search of his lost love.

The man's grip was hard but his hand was cold. "It is good of you to see me so soon—a stranger," Fairweather said.

"A friend of Charles Woodmanston's is a friend of ours," boomed the man. "You are in deep trouble. You have come seeking help. The Church of the Breath of Jesus and the Holy Ozone has never refused to assist a true believer."

The absurd name rolling sonorously from the diapason of Bessmer's cavernous chest surprised Hero. He wondered whether the name was a test to see if he would balk. He said in a hoarse whisper, "You are very kind."

"Sit down," intoned Bessmer, "and we shall see what we can do for you—if it lies within our power." He steered Hero to a chair and sat down opposite. There was an expensive-looking, carved cigarette box of Chinese jade on the table by Hero, as well as ashtrays, a leather Bible, and a framed photograph of a girl who looked like a Hollywood starlet, inscribed: *To the Bessmers. God bless them.*

Bessmer sat with his hands folded. "The burden upon you is a heavy one," he said.

Fairweather made a faint inclination of his head. He was thinking of the last day that he and Ruth Lesley had walked in the dusk, and the perfume of her hair.

"Your bereavement is still very close to you."

Fairweather said, "I don't know what to do or where to turn."

"I am an ordained minister, you may unburden yourself to me." It sounded like a peal of Sunday bells.

Hero allowed him to coax the story out of him, letting slip pertinent details here and there as though torn from an anguished memory. Bessmer listened, his dark eyes moist, his mouth tremulous with sympathy.

The presence of the dead girl was all about him, Fairweather said, so strong that it was agony to be able to come no nearer.

Bessmer sat for a moment with his head bowed, and then, fixing Fairweather with his gaze, said heavily, "We of the Holy Ozone claim no miraculous powers. We can be no more than a link between those who seek and those who have passed over and wish to return. It is *they* who decide, not we."

Fairweather said faintly, "I understand."

"My wife is a wonderful woman. Through the power which is in her they can come from the other side, those poor wandering ones who seek to be reunited with those who love them."

Hero thought: Different country, different bloke, same pitch. The price ought to be coming up shortly.

"We have seen wonderful results here. A bereaved father has found his loved daughter; a son has been restored to his mother; a missing will has been located. When the power in Sarah Bessmer is strong, the spirit materializes into flesh: the father holds his daughter in his arms; the mother presses her son to her bosom. Perhaps you too could once more enjoy the presence of the one for whom you seek."

Fairweather said, "You give me hope." Hero thought, Here it comes!

The organ fugue of Bessmer's voice droned on.

"These manifestations leave Mother weak and drained. We ask nothing for ourselves for this work. It would not be right to suborn God's gift to suffering humanity. All contributions go to the Church of the Breath of Jesus and the Holy Ozone for the propagation of His word that the dead shall rise again. Contributions are voluntary."

Fairweather whispered huskily, "I am a stranger; perhaps you could suggest what contribution might be acceptable."

Bessmer never batted an eye as he murmured, "Shall we say twenty-five hundred dollars? There would almost certainly be a manifestation, perhaps even a reunion."

Hero almost broke through his cover with a gasp at the man's

unabashed impertinence. Almost a thousand pounds! It was outrageous but a guarantee was implied. Woodmanston must have mentioned that the wealthy Fairweather would be in New York for only a short while. The bird must be plucked quickly.

But Ferguson had instructed him to agree to pay what they asked. Fairweather murmured, "I'd give anything . . . anything to know she's happy."

"The Church donations are paid in cash," Bessmer said. "There is a seance tonight at nine. Bring this card." He rose and Fairweather's hand was clasped in that hard, cold grip. "We shall try," said Bessmer. "We shall try our utmost."

Chapter 3

SAUL WIENER pushed a button and when a girl came in he said, "We will want twenty-five hundred dollars, Miss Jorgenson, in fifties and twenties. Unmarked, please."

Hero was in the New York regional office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation where Wiener, in charge, concerned himself with problems of counter-espionage, sabotage, subversion, domestic Communism. His office was large, quiet and air-conditioned. On the panelled walls hung a photograph of J. Edgar Hoover and the blue-and-gold seals of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Justice.

Hero read the words on a ribbon below the scales of justice: FIDELITY. BRAVERY. INTEGRITY. He was well aware of the reputation of the Bureau's agents.

On Wiener's desk was a photograph of a pleasant-looking woman with a boy and a girl of about nine and twelve, two large black glass ashtrays, and a paper-weight which was a miniature missile on a launching pad. There were "in" and "out" baskets for mail, and two telephones. To the right of the desk, on a small table, there was an intercom with some dozen switches for inter-office communications.

Wiener appeared glum, though he maintained a careful politeness towards Hero. When the secretary returned with the packet of money, he slid it across the desk towards Hero.

Hero said, "You don't seem to be shocked at the amount. I am."

"It depends what you get for it. If those crooks can come up with a dead fiancée who never existed, I'd say it was cheap."

Wiener reached into a folder, pulled out a large filing card containing a photograph in the upper left-hand corner and sailed it across the desk to Hero.

The photograph was of the young Arnold Bessmer, without as much flesh, but with the same compelling eyes, heavy jaw and pretty mouth. There was data on the card: Bessmer, at twenty-seven, had been an ordained preacher but had been defrocked and expelled from his church for molesting a fourteen-year-old girl, for which he had served four years at San Quentin.

Hero slid the card back and said mildly, "If he is a crook, why do you let him operate?"

Wiener said, "If we could have nailed the Bessmers we'd have done so. But they are not involved in any interstate crime and are smart enough to keep from running foul of state laws and city ordinances. Until there is a complaint against them for fraud there is nothing anyone can do. That's why we went to Ferguson." Wiener closed his lips with an almost audible snap and Hero felt it was to keep from adding, And heaven help us, that's how we got you.

Hero said, "People often make the mistake of regarding me as a policeman. I am not. I am an investigator of occult phenomena. My job is to sort out the possibly genuine from the false."

Wiener looked even more morose. He said, "You British still believe in ghosts, don't you?"

Hero observed, "So do you Americans." And when Wiener flashed him a look he said, "Constable, for instance, and the hand of a child dead almost a year."

"What about the hand?" Wiener said. "Isn't that all a part of the act—the tambourines and trumpets floating round in the dark with the medium tied to a chair?"

Hero nodded. He said, "It is pretty revolting, isn't it? But you know, it was your ancestors who started it all."

"What's that?"

"Ever heard of the shaking tent of the Ojibwas?"

"No! What do you mean by my ancestors?"

"If you won't think me impertinent," Hero said, "it seemed to me that you probably had American Indian blood."

Wiener looked annoyed. "How did you know?"

Hero said, "The first time I saw you, I guessed it."

Wiener's suspicion fell away, and he grinned. "There was a Wiener who was a pack pedlar before the Revolution. He married a Seneca girl called First-Flower-That-Comes-After-the-Snow. I am probably the only Indian Jew in this city. I suppose in a ridiculous way I'm proud of it. I have even learned a few phrases in the Seneca language." He nodded towards the framed photograph. "Look at the cheek-bones on the kids. They've got it too." He added, "What was the shaking tent of the Ojibwas?"

Hero replied, "They were Canadian Indians. French missionaries who penetrated the wilderness reported on their ceremony. The medicine man would let them tie him up and place him in a closed wigwam with a small fire going inside. Soon the whole tent would begin to shake, and smoke would come pouring out of the top, after which the voice of the Great Spirit would be heard prophesying. Later, when they opened the wigwam, the medicine man would be lying there, still nicely packaged."

Wiener asked, "How was it done?"

"I suppose the fellow was adept at getting in and out of rope ties. It is really no trick at all. After that, he probably chucked some resinous gum on to the fire, shook the tent and disguised his voice."

"Well," said Wiener, "there you are."

"There wasn't much to the stunt," Hero agreed. "But their remarkable prophecies never were explained—things of which they could not possibly have had any foreknowledge, at least so the missionaries reported. Perhaps the primitives were a little closer to such things. A version of the shaking-tent ceremony has come down to us in the mediums who claim to have an Indian control."

"You really believe in some of that stuff, don't you?"

Hero replied, "I am paid to keep an open mind. When I come across something that cannot be explained I keep at it until I find out how it is done."

"And if you can't?"

"Up to now I always have."

"Do you understand the urgency of this matter?" Wiener said, "No, you can't. You don't know what Operation Foxglove is. We have your security clearance now and there seems to be no reason why you should not know about Foxglove—there are probably a great many reasons why you should."

He shifted in his chair so that he faced Hero and began to speak in a lower key, almost as though the walls of his own office were not to be trusted.

"The field of cybernetics, as you know, embraces the control of the mechanisms of machines as well as living creatures. Constable has concentrated on the issuing of commands to satellites. As the mechanical brains and nervous systems of missiles and satellites become more and more complex, approximating the organization of the human nerve centres, they also become more vulnerable. Professor Constable has shown the way to intrude upon the commands taped into a missile or established by ground radio, persuading it to disobey these commands, or to reverse them."

The shock of the implication struck Hero full force. "Good lord!" he breathed. "He turns them into homing pigeons."

"Exactly. Hostile missiles can be persuaded to return whence they came, or splash into the ocean. Constable is close to achieving the breakthrough. But if the Russians get it before we do, or we lose it, we are all dead ducks. Unfortunately, just as we are on the verge of achieving success—we are about a month or two months away, with Constable absolutely indispensable to the project—somebody works his own racket on him."

"Eh?" said Hero, startled. "His own . . . ?"

"Cybernetics," Wiener said, "the other end of it."

"The human mechanism," Hero cried.

"Someone has found a way to enter into communication with the brain and nervous system of Professor Constable and initiate a series of commands running counter to those taped into him by love of country, loyalty, instinct of self-preservation, honesty, powers of reasoning. Someone has been ordering Professor Constable either to spill his secret . . . or defect with it."

Hero said softly, "But you don't know who."

"Who but the Commies?"

"Or Mary Constable?" Hero suggested. "Or behind Mary Constable, another power? A lot of people believe in God and His miracles."

Wiener said with cutting scorn, "God via the Bessmers?"

"God in any way He wants to manifest Himself. What would you do if it *was* Mary Constable?"

Wiener groaned. "I never wanted you in on this case and I don't want you now."

Hero said quietly, "I can sympathize with your feelings but I am afraid as things stand you no longer have a choice."

Wiener said, "I apologize. I can see your point, of course. We are not accustomed to dealing with abstractions or religious beliefs or even the possibility that a dead child could return to urge her father to betray his country."

"I have not intimated that she has," Hero declared. "But until I know how that hand was materialized and can duplicate it, the case against the materialization of Mary Constable remains not proven."

Wiener's boyish smile broke through again and he said, "Very well then. We will let it go at that. But you do now understand the urgency?"

"I do indeed!" said Alexander Hero. "Better even than you could ever think."

Chapter 4

IT WAS nine o'clock that same evening when Hero pulled the door bell of No. 12A West 91st Street and was admitted by the same servant, now wearing a black alpaca coat. He inspected the card that Hero presented and counted the packet of notes handed over. Hero noted traces of a cauliflower ear. This would be a rough customer in a fracas. In the dark of the seance room he would probably be on hand, and if someone were to grab at a materialization, for instance, he would regret it.

There were ten people gathered in the parlour into which Hero was shown. Mr. Woodmanston greeted him, twittering, "My dear fellow!

How splendid that you were able to come. So pleased I could arrange it. I do hope there will be a contact. Allow me to introduce you to everyone. Mrs. Bessmer is resting. You will meet her when she comes down."

He fingered Hero's arm, gently guiding him, as he rattled off the names: Mr. and Mrs. James Rimbaud, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Clark, Mr. Holworthy, Miss Agathey, and a Miss Forsby, Mrs. Hennessy, Mr. Weitzenkorn. But for their American voices, they could have been any group of sitters from London, Birmingham or Leeds. All of them were people unable to cope with the realities of life and death and needing the comforting delusions to be found at a seance. All appeared to be genuine.

When Arnold Bessmer entered, wearing a morning coat and a minister's collar, he moved among them speaking in deep organ tones. "Friend Holworthy—— Come to visit your spirit mate—— We missed you at the last meeting, Mrs. Hennessy, so did your husband. Ah! Friend Weitzenkorn, I hope we shall have something for you——"

He engulfed Hero's hand in both of his. "Dear, new friend Fairweather. I hope we shall be able to help you. I *feel* we will. Sarah feels the magnetic fluid flowing strongly tonight. She will be here in a moment."

Then he raised his voice and addressed them all. "Are your minds clear? Are your thoughts of grace? Think sweet thoughts of your loved ones. Call to them."

Hero had a strong, clear impression that those messages from Mary Constable, the subtle, progressive indoctrinations, were not the creation of Arnold Bessmer. The man was clever and no doubt dangerous, but it was the crude, bare-faced shrewdness of the carnival barker who has learned how to size up a crowd or an individual instantly. He could dish it up for the mugs, but his was not the intelligence to steer the brain of Samuel Hale Constable.

Nor was Mrs. Sarah Bessmer's. She came into the room, a composite of all the mediums he had exposed in London and on the continent. She was of average height but powerfully built, with huge hams of fleshy arms which, Hero knew, in women could be deceptively strong. He looked to her wrists, hands and fingers. The little lumps of muscle

were there. Her head was large; she had a strong Roman nose and dark eyes behind steel-rimmed spectacles. Her iron-grey hair was combed high on her head in the pompadour style. Most mediums wore their hair in this fashion. It was useful for the concealment of small objects.

She was even dressed as he had expected her to be, in black, over what was probably old-fashioned corsets. She exuded an odour of mustiness and camphor balls.

Woodmanston flutteringly introduced Fairweather, and her brash gaze took in her new sitter fully.

She said, "I can see spirits all about you, young man. I feel like I got the power tonight." She moved off among the others, saying, "It oughta be a good meeting. I feel the power. Are we all here?"

Her husband answered, "No, not yet. We are waiting for our dear friend Professor Constable."

The door-bell clanged. A silence fell upon those in the room. Hero heard the servant pad to the entrance. Professor Constable entered the parlour a moment later.

There is always some slight shock when a person formerly seen only as a photograph comes to life. Hero experienced it now, at the sight of the lion's head with the bushy grey hair, the fiercely intelligent eyes and the stubborn chin. Behind the ample dome of his brow he carried the knowledge upon which rested the safety of almost half the people on the face of the globe.

His eyes appeared to take in none of them. No one addressed him. His thoughts turned inward, he simply melted in with the others, who now faced the far end of the parlour where curtains were drawn back, revealing sliding doors which were opened to admit them to the spacious room at the back of the house.

Hero studied the layout. At the far end of the room was the "cabinet" he had expected, indispensable to "materialization mediums." It was an enclosure, some ten feet square, of heavy black cloth curtains. These curtains were now open, revealing a chair, a small table on which reposed a tambourine, a tin trumpet, a dinner bell and a small accordion.

Facing the cabinet and some five yards from it at its farthest point was a semicircle of chairs.

There were windows on either side of the cabinet, but the curtains were drawn. On one side of the room was a large radiogram. The servant, having already rolled shut the sliding doors behind them, had taken up a post by the instrument.

The others were seating themselves. Professor Constable sat hunched down, legs extended forward, hands thrust into his trouser pockets.

Bessmer sat down next to Constable and motioned for Hero to take the seat on his other side, with Woodmanston occupying the vacant chair on Hero's right.

Bessmer suddenly asked, "You ever attend a seance before, friend Fairweather?"

Fairweather replied in a voice husky with anticipatory nerves, "No. You must tell me what to do."

"Do what the spirits say. I'll help you. I have prayed for you, brother. Amen."

There were murmurs of "Amen" from others.

Sarah Bessmer strode to the front of the cabinet and stood facing the sitters, her heavy features expressionless, except for the glitter of her eyes behind the lenses of her spectacles. She said: "The power is there. I can feel them in the air round me, waiting. I'll do my best—for all of you."

"Amen," intoned Bessmer.

"Amen," the others echoed.

Mrs. Bessmer lifted her powerful, fleshy chin and said, "We got a new sitter here tonight. Mr. Fairweather. He will want me tied up to the chair, no doubt, for proof. So there can't be any complaints. Is that right, Mr. Fairweather?"

Fairweather seemed to dissolve into a jelly of fright and embarrassment. "What? What?" he jittered. "Of course not! I mean whatever you say, whichever way is the best."

Bessmer said ringingly, "Are you sure you want to, Mother? It don't seem right when you give so much!"

Mrs. Bessmer replied, "I want to be tied up. Mr. Woodmanston, please?"

Woodmanston whispered proudly to Fairweather, "I'm always the one who ties her. I know how." He went to the cabinet. From behind

the curtains Mrs. Bessmer produced a length of heavy cord. She sat in the chair by the table and little Woodmanston bound her to it, winding and rewinding the rope about her legs, arms and chest, stopping only to fashion an intricate knot, then continuing until the last foot of cord was exhausted and she was trussed up like a mummy.

He returned to his chair glowing with pride. "No doubts, now!" he said.

Hero chortled within himself and thought: Thirty seconds and she'll be out of there.

Bessmer arose, and said, "Any sealed messages?"

Four of those present handed him envelopes of thin airmail paper. Bessmer showed them to Fairweather.

"Sewn up with coloured silk," he said, "so that they cannot be opened. They will be returned in the same condition. The spirits maybe will answer the questions inside." He deposited the envelopes on the table.

Hero thought: That chestnut, in this day and age! All the envelopes supplied, of course, by the Bessmers.

Bessmer pulled the black curtains closed and returned to his chair and sat down. "Join hands," he said and groped for Constable's and Fairweather's. Fairweather felt Woodmanston's hand, like a small bird, creep into his own.

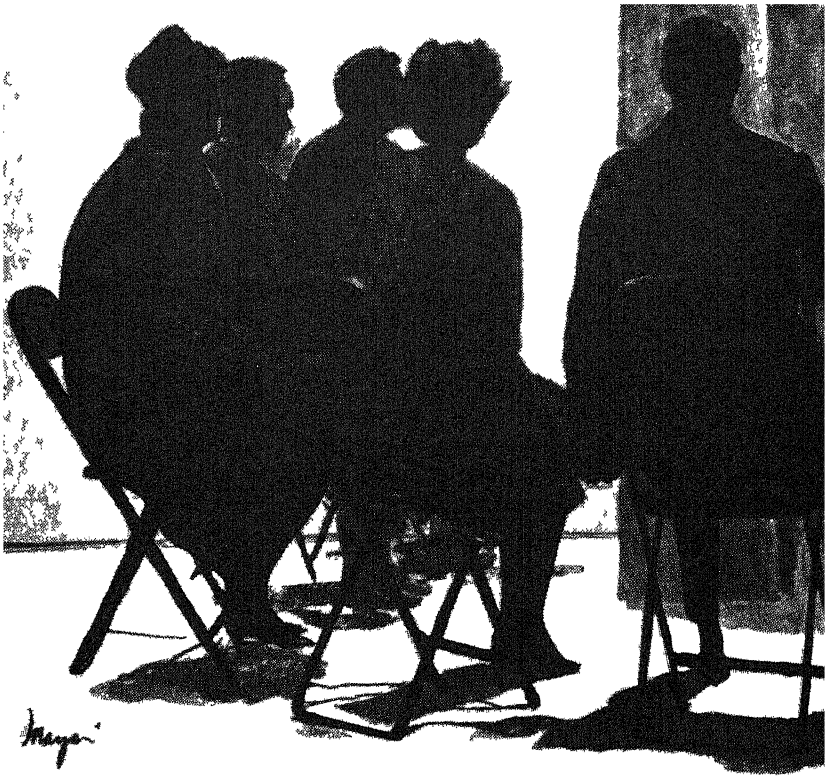
"Lights, Pratt," Bessmer said, and the manservant flicked the switch and plunged them into darkness. Somewhere in the room there was a small, red glow which diluted the density of the murk yet did not enable one to see more than outlines or shapes. But it was a light that would enable anyone to swear later that whatever happened had taken place under illumination.

Bessmer said to Fairweather, "You must not be impatient. Sometimes it takes a long time."

"Yes," whispered Fairweather, "I have prayed that she will come."

"Music, Pratt," Bessmer said.

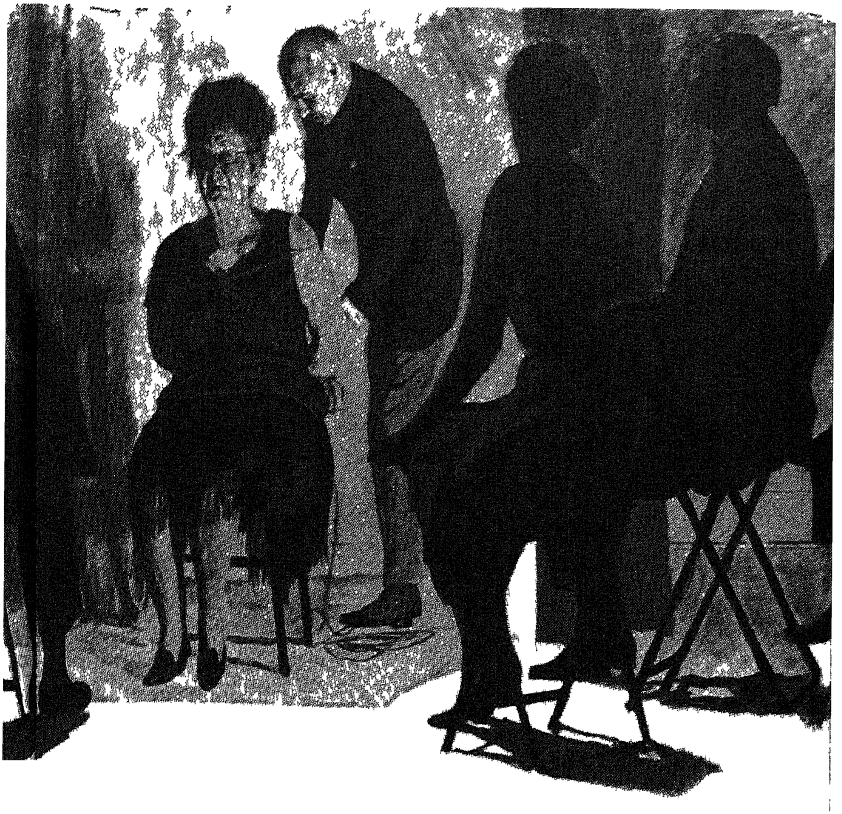
Another switch clicked and the gramophone gave out internal noises preparatory to dropping a record on to the turntable. Then church bells chimed, there was an organ introduction and a male choir launched into "Shall We Gather At The River?"



"Let us all join in," Bessmer boomed. Nervous, quavery voices took up the tune

In the dark, Peter Fairweather went back to Cambridge and he imagined Ruth Lesley Her brown head was lowered over the notes she was taking. He felt the thrill of recognition, of a woman who might become his beloved. When she raised her eyes to his and he saw her fully, he knew.

In his invention of Ruth Lesley, Hero reached far back to a subconscious recollection of a girl who had appeared to him in a dream and kissed him. They had walked hand in hand through a meadow of spring flowers The sweetness of the moment had filled him with joy and melancholy. He was then a boy Who had she been? She never



came again. But the echoes of her loveliness sometimes rang faintly through him.

The hymn finished. The silence that followed was disturbed by an ugly sound—a strangled moan that issued from the cabinet.

Bessmer whispered, "Sarah's starting." Again he ordered music. The record was "Lead Kindly Light." "All sing," he said.

The noise (which provided excellent cover for whatever "Mother" might be getting up to in the cabinet) enabled Peter Fairweather to return to his imagined love.

He invented a golden afternoon of bicycling together down a country lane and stopping to rest, sitting side by side on a bank, then turning to one another silently, filled with exultation and joy. . . .

But Ruth had been doomed to death. Self-hypnotized, Fairweather created the utter misery and desolation of a world gone dark, of an endless groping through that darkness in search of the for ever lost. His darling was dead, the warm flesh cold, closed the melting, tender eyes, vanished the laughter, the gentle voice. Where had she gone?

The record had run out again and a low moaning and whimpering came from the cabinet. Then, startlingly, the tambourine thumped and rattled, the accordion wheezed the opening strains of "Nearer My God To Thee," and the trumpet, glowing with phosphorescence, floated round in the air.

Bessmer whispered, "Shhh. The spirits have come." Hero, standing apart, was grimly disgusted. Fairweather continued to be filled with yearning and sadness.

A rataplan of raps issued from the cabinet. One of the women exclaimed, "Oh! Something touched me!" Hero felt a chilly current of air and what seemed to be an icy hand brushing past his ear. He started in spite of himself.

"Don't move," whispered Bessmer. "They're all round us."

Hero didn't doubt this and was amazed that, experienced as he was, his senses had tricked him. But his nose had not. He had recognized the faint, stale, musty odour. There were some murmurs and little shrieks and cries from other sitters. In the faint, red glow of light there was nothing to be seen. Then things quietened down, except for the heavier breathing of the sitters.

Then, out of the darkness, was heard a deep voice with tinny overtones provided by the trumpet through which it was speaking. "How! Me Big Chief Thundering-Cloud. Me come from Spirit Land."

Bessmer whispered to Fairweather, "That's Sarah's Indian control, Chief Thundering-Cloud. He was killed at the battle of the Little Bighorn."

"Me got-um messages," intoned the Chief. "Miss Agathey ask if brother got-um books other side. Brother, he say got-um plenty books. Everybody got-um plenty everything other side."

Miss Agathey cried, "Oh thank you, Chief! I am so relieved. Howard would feel lost without his books."

Big Chief Thundering-Cloud was on his second round.

"Mr. Weitzenkorn say to wife, Leah, you happy? Will I be able to see you? Leah, she say I happy. You maybe see me sometime."

"The messages are in sealed envelopes," Bessmer's whisper reminded Fairweather. "They will be returned unopened."

Hero's thought was: And in the meantime "Mother" is reading them through the envelopes with a pencil torch.

After several more messages, Big Chief took his leave. There was a delicate tinkle and rattle of tambourine bells, followed by a squeaky voice saying, "Hallo, everybody! I'se here, Princess Devi from Spirit Land."

Bessmer hissed an explanation. "Mother's Hindu control, only twelve years old. Child bride. When her husband, the maharaja, died she had to commit thuggee."

Hero thought, a man who confused thuggee, a system of robbery and murder, with suttee, the widow's self-immolation on her husband's funeral pyre, certainly could have no part in the subtle and dangerous Constable messages. The Hindu child bride talked baby-talk with a stage Southern accent—probably as close to Hindi as Mother Bessmer could come. Hero wondered how Professor Constable could tolerate this performance.

Princess Devi delivered several spirit messages. One was for the Rimbaud couple: "Baby Bobby is well and happy; everybody on the other side admires his beautiful, big blue eyes."

In the darkness came a sob and a woman's voice, "Oh, it's true! It's true! He had heavenly blue eyes!"

"There is a very strong spirit here," squeaked Princess Devi. "She wants to come through to someone. A Mr. Fairwevver"

Woodmanston was tugging at his hand and whispering, "That's you, Fairweather! It's for you!"

Fairweather said, "What?" And then, "Yes, yes, I am here. This is Peter Fairweather speaking."

The tambourine tinkled faintly, as though it were receding, and the horrid, baby voice of Princess Devi was more distant. "There's a spirit come to see you, Mr. Fairweather. I'se a-goin' now. Listen! She wants to speak to you."

In the darkness, the ensuing silence seemed thick and enveloping.

Then a soft, thrilling voice came from nowhere. "Peter! Peter dear! Can you hear me?"

Peter Fairweather was startled. The speech was that of an English girl. It was the voice of Ruth Lesley as he had imagined her. And Hero was equally staggered. Here was no vulgar ventriloquist. Every accent, every syllable fell familiarly on his ears.

"Peter! Dear Peter! I can't see you. Where are you?"

Peter Fairweather rose from his chair, snapping the chain of hands. He spoke her name. "Ruth!"

"Peter! Come to me."

Bessmer said softly, "She's calling you. Go to her."

Fairweather cried, "Where? Where is she?"

"Come to me, Peter!" The call was soft and sweet.

"In the cabinet," Bessmer said. "Go to the cabinet."

The red light seemed to glow more brightly for an instant, driving back the deeper shadows and revealing the outline of the cabinet. Its curtains were moving. Fairweather moved forward. He could hear the heavy breathing and faint moaning of the medium.

"Peter, hurry!" The thrilling whisper was so faint that none but himself could have heard it. He parted the curtains, stepped inside, and was enveloped by blackness.

There was a rustle and the whisper of his name, and then Ruth Lesley was in his arms, her body pressed to his, her arms about his neck, her mouth upon his, expressive of all the hunger and longing and overwhelming love that they had known.

There was nothing held back in the embrace. She was all his, as she had been from the beginning and now promised to be throughout eternity. There were no words, only the sweetness of contact. Then there was a low sweet laugh and he was alone. He tried to push the darkness away from him and find her, and as he felt about, his fingers encountered coarse hair and then the large beak nose and fleshy face of the medium, and he touched the cords that bound her. She began to strain and moan. Almost in panic Fairweather reached for the curtain, opened it and staggered into the faint red luminescence which, from where he stood, outlined the shapes of the sitters in their semicircle like a court of doom. Somehow he managed to regain his seat.

He was confused and furiously angry. He had been moved both physically and emotionally. He realized that there are some women whose kisses convey only innocence, and others whose lips are so soft, clinging and sensuous that thoughts become tumbled and the senses reel. It was such a girl that he had held in his arms in the cabinet. He had been overwhelmed to the point where his cold and accurate powers of observation, so greatly needed at this seance, had deserted him.

Peter Fairweather's mental creation of the non-existent Ruth Lesley had taken on life. Fairweather-Hero wondered whether the power of his yearning for this imaginary person might not have been communicated to some wandering spirit who had appeared to assuage his loss. Then he was furious at himself. The Bessmers had pulled a stunt which used to be worked at the turn of the century on senile old men for whom "spirit brides" were produced.

Human nature had not changed in a matter of fifty years nor had the tricks used to gull it. Through Woodmanston and himself a character had been built up for the Bessmers of a distraught and wealthy young man—a set-up for a physical manifestation. They had soaked him for all the traffic would bear and then delivered the goods. But who was "Ruth Lesley"?

One thing was certain. A real Peter Fairweather would be coming back for more.

He heard Woodmanston whisper, "Did you find her?" And Bessmer asked, "Was there someone there?"

Fairweather answered, "Yes—yes. It was Ruth."

With his pulses slowing, Hero could now give his attention to analysing what he remembered of Ruth Lesley. She had been tall. When she was in his arms, her brow was just at his chin. She was slender and she was young, for there had been the pressure of firm breasts against his body. She had worn a garment of some smooth material.

This and the memory of her sensuality was all he knew of her. He regretted now that he had not had with him a certain small device to enable him to see in the dark, of the kind Mother Bessmer used. But it had been important at this first visit to behave and observe exactly as the other sitters did.

Something was knocking at his memory—something that he had

overlooked. It came to him: there had been a fragrance about her. It was hardly a scent at all but, and here he smiled at his own extravagance, a distillation of starlight and sunlight, somehow far off and intangible.

Rubbish! said Hero to himself.

But that's what it smelt like, insisted Fairweather.

The sickening voice of the Princess Devi control was again delivering messages. They were ambiguous, vaguely comforting.

Then suddenly, Princess Devi gurgled, "Ooh! Hello, Mary! Don't you look pretty tonight! All pretty for your Daddy!"

The room suddenly resounded to a young and silvery laugh, the infectious laughter of a child. Hero's nerve ends were throbbing.

Princess Devi said, "Daddy Constable, your Mary is here. Come to see Mary, Daddy Constable. But you mustn't touch. If you are a *good* Daddy, Mary will kiss you. Good-bye now. . . ." The voice became fainter and was gone. Nothing stirred, no one moved. Someone or something whispered, "Daddy! Daddy!"

Hero experienced the feeling that the light had changed. There was a faint, phosphorescent glow before the cabinet. Its outline was now dimly visible and in front of it, upon the floor, her legs curled beneath her, her hands in her lap, was the figure of a child. At least this was the impression made upon Hero by the shape, for it was too dark to see detail.

There was a noise at his left and he dimly perceived the hulking body of the Professor shambling towards the materialization of his dead daughter.

The room was quiet now except for the entranced medium who was whimpering faintly. The bulk of Professor Constable was silhouetted against the diffused and concealed red lighting as he sank to his knees before the little figure.

"Mary!" he cried in a voice filled with love and yearning.

"I'm here, Daddy!" The voice of Mary Constable had the true, eager breathlessness of the very young girl. "I want to kiss you, Daddy. In case They won't let me come again." There was a change in the position of the faint figure and then a light cry, "Oh Daddy! Prickles!" followed by the silver laughter, and Professor Constable laughed too.

The hair on Hero's neck began to rise. Evidently "prickles" was a family joke. There was a sob from Constable.

In God's name, Hero thought, why do they force him to this in front of all these idiots? Why don't they let him into the cabinet for his rendezvous? And then Hero realized how addled he was. Witnesses were wanted to confirm Professor Constable's conviction that his child had returned.

The voice of a child again penetrated the darkness. "They were angry today, Daddy. They're so good and wise, it's awful when They're angry. They said you must work for us over here, or I should not be allowed to see you. They said you would know how."

"Mary!" Constable cried. "My darling!"

"Daddy, I love you! Don't let Them take me away. They only want the world to be good. They have sent you another message."

"What is it, Mary?"

"You *are* your brother's keeper. I don't understand——"

"My God!" said Constable. "I do."

"Good-bye, Daddy! I must go now."

"Will you come again, Mary?"

"I don't know, Daddy. You must make Them let me by obeying Them. You want to see me happy, don't you?"

"Will you kiss me again, Mary?"

"They don't want me to." Her voice had become fainter. "They're calling me. Good-bye, Daddy! Help me."

There then came a great gasping cry from the medium which startled the intent listeners. The faint figure before the cabinet was gone and Professor Constable was groping his way back to his seat. Hero felt the breeze of his passage on his cheek. And there was a second sensation, half imagined, perhaps. It filled Alexander Hero with horror. In his nostrils was the faintest suspicion of the curious scent that had clung to Ruth Lesley, as though some of the fragrance had been picked up by Constable.

Were Ruth Lesley and Mary Constable by some transformation one and the same phantom? Tall, slender, sensuous woman into small, gentle child?

"Lights!" bawled Bessmer, so loudly that Hero felt his nerves jump.

With dazzling suddenness the lights came on. Simultaneously, the four curtained walls of the cabinet fell to the ground, revealing the table with the instruments still on it, and Mother Bessmer roped to her chair, head lolled back, face slightly empurpled, tongue protruding. She seemed to be half strangling.

"That's all," said Bessmer. "The power has gone out of her. Untie her. Some water, Pratt."

Woodmanston rushed to release her. Bessmer held up her head as Pratt arrived with a glass. And Mother Bessmer came to with a "Where am I?" performance. The seance was over.

Hero wanted to get out. Above all, he wished to get away not only from the Bessmers but from Constable. He had the feeling that he would not be able to look him in the face, though his mission was to learn more about him.

An admiring cluster was beginning to form round Mother Bessmer. Pratt had removed the props and taken away the curtains of the cabinet. The double doors between the seance room and the parlour had been rolled back. Hero knew that he ought to be prying about where the cabinet had been, looking for sliding panels or trap-doors, but he would do that the next time. He began to edge towards the door.

"Hey there, friend Fairweather!" Bessmer bellowed. "Not so fast. We have refreshments. Stay and enjoy yourself."

Pratt had produced some trays of sickly-looking fruit punch, sandwiches and highly coloured petits fours. The others were already helping themselves and standing about chatting as though five minutes ago they had not believed themselves in communication with the beyond. And Professor Constable was among them, sipping punch. Mother Bessmer was stuffing herself. "When the power goes out of me I get real hungry," she remarked.

The reason for the party was obvious. Relaxed through the social contact and flattered to be allowed to meet the Bessmers on an equal footing, the sitters would be off-guard and reveal further information about themselves which would be used at the next seance to bind them more tightly in the toils. Constable remained for these ghastly socials, Hero was certain, because he was afraid to offend the Bessmers. And it was at these gatherings, while he was still emotionally upset, that

Constable would let fall items that he was convinced were known only to his daughter and himself.

"Have you met Professor Constable, my dear Fairweather?" Woodmanston was saying. Constable acknowledged the introduction with a sharp glance and a grunt. "The Professor had a splendid contact tonight. The dear little creature's voice was so clear. You must tell us about yours, Fairweather. It isn't often one gets to go inside the cabinet. Was there a manifestation?"

Hero reclaimed Fairweather, who stammered, "Yes—well, I mean I'm not sure—I think so. It is the first time I have ever If I could come back again"

"Of course!" boomed Bessmer and clapped Hero on the shoulder. "Mother, Mr. Fairweather's going to be one of our regulars."

Hero was aware that Constable had thrown him another sharp look. He still felt embarrassment for the man, and a deep pity. He moved away and tried to close his ears to the shop-talk about ectoplasm, clairvoyance, astral bodies and spirit magnetism.

After a while, Bessmer clapped his hands for silence. "Friends, it's been a great evening. I think you will all agree that Mother Bessmer has earned her rest tomorrow and Sunday. We will meet at the same time on Monday night. Go to church on Sunday, folks, and pray. God bless you all. Good night, good night."

At the door Pratt was seated at a small table with cards before him. He handed Hero one, and said, "A grand from now on, the boss says." Shocked by the impudence of it, Hero managed to stammer, "A-all right. I'll have it Monday," and turned away.

He found himself hauling great gulps of night air into his lungs. He was badly shaken by the implications of the seance and the colossal nerve of this pair. Nor was he one iota closer to the brain or the body behind Mary Constable, or who had made the hand, or how. He descended the steps, thinking furiously, and in confusion he turned westward down 91st Street.

He had not gone far when he was aware of hurrying footsteps behind him, and a voice accosted him.

"Ah, Fairweather," said Professor Constable. "I see you are going my way."

Chapter 5

To HOAX the Bessmers on what a Cambridge lecturer might be like was one thing; to pull the wool over Constable's eyes was another. And the first thing Constable said was, "Woodmanston tells me you lecture at Cambridge. What subject?"

Hero had spent four years at King's College a decade ago; but ten years mark few changes in a great university. He answered, "Applied psychology," and added, "at Churchill College." Churchill had been founded in 1960, and it was unlikely that Constable would have been there. "My college was King's," he said.

"How's old Underhill?" Constable asked.

"Retired," Fairweather replied.

"He was my tutor in hydrodynamics some thirty years ago. He was never entirely sound, you know," Constable commented.

"That's what Professor Heisinger said when he reviewed Underhill's latest book. They are having rather a row in *The Times*."

Constable laughed, and they continued to chat amiably about people they had known at Cambridge. On the corner of Broadway they stopped and Constable said, "I wonder if you would care to have a night-cap with me. I don't live very far from here."

"How very kind," said Peter Fairweather. "Gladly."

Constable hailed a taxi and they rode in silence to a narrow three-storied house on 113th Street. The Professor let them in and led Hero upstairs to his study. He said, "Make yourself comfortable. There ought to be some beer on ice, and Jane usually leaves something to eat." He grinned. "I don't know about you, but the Bessmer offering doesn't do much for me."

Hero was surprised at the slight mockery in his tone. The scientist said, "I shan't be a minute."

Hero turned his attention to the study. One side of the large room was lined with books. There was an Early American desk, several deep leather chairs, a leather couch and two steel filing cabinets. Near the desk stood a pedestal on top of which was a glass-fronted case of ebony. Inside was a support of black velvet and upon it, palm upward in an

attitude of supplication, was the perfect wax cast of the hand and wrist of a young girl.

The Englishman dared not make a close examination of it, for he did not know how long Constable would be gone. Instead he looked at the books. A large section was devoted to cybernetics.

There were books on anatomy, on the nerve systems of animals and humans, on electronics, computers, servo systems and automation. The name S. H. Constable caught his eye, and he pulled down a book titled *The Machine, Master or Servant?* The publication date was 1959. Hero thumbed through it and found himself in a barely intelligible welter of equations and diagrams. Still engrossed, he did not even hear Constable return bearing a tray containing bottles of beer, glasses and a dish covered with a napkin. He set it down on the desk and came to look over Hero's shoulder.

He snorted, "That's out of date." He turned to remove the napkin from the dish, revealing appetizing sandwiches of roast beef, chicken and cheese. They enjoyed these, washing the food down with lager.

Constable said, "I should be interested, if you wouldn't mind, in hearing something of your experience tonight. I understand that you recently suffered a bereavement."

Fairweather reflected that Woodmanston was better than radio or television for spreading news. He said, "Yes. I lost my fiancée."

"Was she there tonight?" asked Constable.

"Yes—I think so," Fairweather said. "When it's the first time—when in one second all of your preconceived notions are overthrown and you are required to make the transition from the world of the living to the living dead, you doubt the evidence of your senses."

Constable nodded. "It's a shock at the beginning." He repeated, "Was she there?"

Fairweather thought he detected a note of entreaty. He said again, "I thought so."

"It was her voice?"

"As nearly as I can remember. It was a whisper."

"Touch?" Constable queried.

There was no mistaking Constable's anxiety. Fairweather hesitated, then let his voice drop. "I felt contact. . . ."

"Like flesh and blood?" Constable's voice was low and intense.

Hero sent up a warning to his *alter ego* Fairweather. In humouring Constable wasn't he confirming the scientist's belief in the phenomenon that had been produced for him?

His dilemma was fraught with danger. If he denied the contact and maintained scepticism he would be shown the door, for it would not be what Constable wanted to hear.

"The contact was like flesh and blood," Fairweather said.

"What happened?" Petulance had crept into Constable's voice. "I am never allowed inside the cabinet with her as you were. She tells me I am not to touch her. Were you caressed? Did she whisper secrets to you that only the two of you could have known?"

"Yes," said Fairweather, shaken. "I don't know what to believe."

"Neither did I at first. But if you must have incontrovertible proof, look behind you in the cabinet." They went and stood on either side of it. "That," said the Professor, "is the right hand of my daughter, Mary. She was ten years old when she died, a little over a year ago. She left me this as proof of her return."

Fairweather regarded the thin, transparent shell of the wax hand with morbid fascination. It was innocent and touching, apparently inexplicable, a glimpse of that long-sought breakthrough that would change the world if only it could be proven. And yet it was a wicked challenge and enigma. As an expert at illusions himself, he could think of no way to duplicate it. But there must be a way.

"They had prepared for it," Dr. Constable was saying. "There was a bowl of melted wax and another of cold water. She came, I saw her—she plunged her little hand into the wax. . . ."

"Was there light?"

"There was at the beginning, perhaps later there wasn't. But I heard the splash of water and she laughed and said, 'Don't 'plash, Daddy.' It was what she said when she was a baby and I used to splash her in her bath. After she said good-bye, the lights went up and the hand was on the table, still dripping wet."

Constable unlocked the cabinet with a small key from his chain and lifted out the hand. He passed it to Fairweather, who marvelled at the delicacy of the curled fingers, the fine lines of the palm.

"The finger-prints are hers," Professor Constable asserted.

Hero could see the loops, whorls and ridges etched upon the inside of the cast. But he asked, "Were your daughter's palm prints taken at the same time as the finger-prints?"

"What difference would that have made?" Constable's voice was harsh with emotion. "Perhaps I ought to tell you. The child was cremated." When he took the hand from Fairweather he wore an expression of satisfaction. "Proof positive," he said as he relocked the case. "There have been spirit hands before this. Kluski in Vienna, around 1910. Other crude fakes, like the ones that fooled Conan Doyle. Marjorie, the Boston medium of forty years ago, produced finger-prints. They turned out to be those of her dentist."

Constable had reviewed all the cases of wax spirit hands and the methods by which they were produced, but none was comparable to the manifestation of the hand of Mary Constable.

"Well, what do you think?" Constable asked.

He's caught, Hero reflected. Obsessed. He said, "Frankly, I was bothered by Chief Thundering-Cloud and little Devi."

Constable threw back his head and roared with laughter. "We don't pay any attention to Mother Bessmer's little jokes," he said.

Hero was startled by the ambivalence of the man and his ability to see so clearly one part of the picture. Yet Hero knew that the most unshakeable of the converts to spiritualism were those who were able to admit the occasional hoax. And some of them were men of science. The medical doctor and writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the physicist Sir Oliver Lodge—and each, like Constable, had suffered a tragic loss. Time and again they had had their noses rubbed in the truth, and yet refused to see. He decided to test Constable further.

"But those contributions to their church" he said.

Constable looked at him quizzically. "Did they sting you?"

Hero said, "Twenty-five hundred dollars."

"Well, you've probably got it. I pay them a couple of hundred dollars a week." And he added with asperity, "Man, how can you put a price on the return of the dead? Mother Bessmer"

Fairweather cried, "Mother Bessmer! You never knew my fiancée. Would she come to me through such a"

"Hell's fire, man!" Constable pounded the desk with his fist. "You never knew my daughter!" His face had become suffused with anger. "It's the power, man!" he cried. "When it comes, it's no chooser of persons. The spirits have to have the medium's power to enable them to come through. What difference does it make who she is?" He slumped into his chair, and sat with his head sunk on his chest and his long legs extended before him.

Hero looked down upon him and saw through to the overweening ego that was leading him to sell out his country to satisfy his father hunger, to preserve his own immortality in the person of his daughter.

Constable said, "You're not convinced, are you?"

Fairweather replied, "I shall go back again on Monday."

Constable said, "I'll see you there. It is difficult at first, but you will have proof through little things, secrets between you that no one else could know—such things as Mary says to me."

Fairweather said, "But what a curious thing for a ten-year-old child to say—'You *are* your brother's keeper.'"

Constable flared up. "It wasn't *she* who said it. It was They."

Fairweather simply looked a question at him.

Constable chose to answer with another question. "What can anyone know of the beyond, except what those who have passed over have told us? If I can flip a message to the farthest galaxies, so can whatever or whoever is out there communicating with us." He looked gravely at Fairweather. "Do you know how awful it is out there; how far, how cold, how dark, how lonely? Can you imagine the horror of space —the heat, the chill multiplied to infinity?"

Hero thought: He is terrified of what "They" have threatened to do to the spirit of his child. They will win unless I can stop it.

"You were very kind to come," Professor Constable said.

The interview was over. As they moved towards the door Constable's gaze rested upon the translucent hand for an instant. His expression became fond and relaxed.

As the door closed behind him, Hero looked at his watch. It was half past two. Thirty seconds later his tooth hit him a wallop that nearly knocked him to the pavement. When he pulled himself together to continue to Broadway to get a cab, he was already mentally in the chair

of Dr. Hofstetter. He had decided to call him first thing in the morning, when the pain left as suddenly as it had come. There was only the slightest echo of throbbing in his cheek when he stopped a cab and directed it to his hotel.

SLEEP, however, would not come. Too much had happened since he had stepped off the plane at Kennedy Airport eighteen hours before. And to this was added the realization that he had just been in the company of a man who was contemplating an action which was fraught with the most terrible consequences.

Samuel Hale Constable was not just another sorrowing father being diddled by a pair of magicians. He was a time bomb fused to go off, to destroy an entire civilization unless he could be brought to his senses. Action should have been taken long ago. If Constable was planning to defect or pass on his discovery to the Russians, he was a traitor and ought to be seized and confined at once.

Hero paused to laugh bitterly at himself. He was thinking along the same lines as General Augstadt. It was just as important to the West that Constable complete his work as it was that he be kept from spilling it to the Communists. Ferguson was right. The man must be brought round by a demonstration that his "proof" was no proof at all. But how much time was there left?

At eight the telephone rang. It was Wiener. "What was it like last night?" he asked anxiously.

Hero replied, "Inconclusive."

Wiener echoed, "Inconclusive! You'd better drop by."

There was not so much as a nudge from the tooth, and under the circumstances, it seemed silly to bother with the dentist. He put the matter out of his mind.

AFTER listening to what Hero had had to tell him of the seance, Wiener was for immediate action. "We take the place," he said. "If we pick the brat up by the scruff of her neck and hold her under Constable's nose, where does he go from there?"

"Out of Operation Foxglove," Hero said. "And what if there isn't any brat?"

Wiener said, "You make me sick!"

Hero said, almost sympathetically, "Let's say you rush the place. You have to get through the door and into the seance room. By that time you would find nothing. Those are slick operators. You might pick up bits of apparatus, but you would not find Mary Constable. And her father would continue to believe in her. He would never forgive you for the raid."

"Believe it or not, the same idea struck me after my outburst." Wiener smiled.

Hero grinned back at him. "And I agree with you, in so far as up to now, in my opinion, there has not been a single case proven of the dead returned or the existence of a spirit world."

"Why do you say up to now?"

"Because for me the next case always remains open until I can shut the door. Until I am able to show how that damned hand was made, the case of Mary Constable remains unproven."

"But supposing *you* were to grab the little girl next time, child or midget, whatever she is, for Constable's inspection?"

"We don't grab," Hero said. "All it precipitates is a lot of milling about in the dark, an unholy and messy row. Besides, the Bessmers have a very unpleasant-looking chap working for them"

Wiener said, "The estimable Pratt, eh?" He consulted a folder. "An ex-wrestler and ex-con. He came here with the Bessmers—from Los Angeles. There is a cook, Annie Riley, also living in the house. Her references are O.K. Otherwise everybody who comes into the house goes out. Sitters, applicants, postmen, delivery boys—you name 'em, we've got 'em."

Wiener shoved a batch of photographs over to Hero. They were day and night shots, the latter made by infra-red light, of people entering or leaving the Bessmer establishment. "We can't find any trace of either a child or a young girl coming or going."

Hero said, "It certainly wasn't Mother Bessmer speaking."

Wiener grunted. Then he looked quizzically at Hero and said, "Well, what about your girl friend? You're not going to try to tell me they can materialize someone who never existed!"

Hero had not described the shattering embrace of "Ruth Lesley,"

and had merely reported contact of voice and touch. He said, "I mean to have a look at her and Mary Constable on Monday." Hero produced a black tube from his pocket. "Sniperscope," he said. "Not too efficient, but it works. Mother Bessmer must be using some similar kind of device. The room is probably gimmicked with infra-red or black light. That's how she moves about."

Wiener gave a sigh of relief. "You do believe it's a Commie job, don't you?"

"I certainly do," Hero said. "A brilliant, subtle piece of work."

Wiener tapped his teeth with a pencil. "The thing that puzzles me is why they work through cheap crooks like the Bessmers."

"Because there isn't anything better. That's what most mediums are like, vicious and vulgar. But the point is, it works. The Bessmers have hooked Constable, haven't they?" Then he added, "I went home with Constable after the seance."

Wiener sat up in his chair. "Did you now?" The way he said it showed that he was impressed. "Is he going to defect?"

Hero said, "Not yet. That would put him out of touch with his child. As long as the Bessmers are allowed to work he will stay."

"But will he make contact with the Russians?"

"He will, unless we can manage to open his eyes. It's the hand. He's convinced it's genuine."

Wiener cried, "A man with Constable's brains!"

"Not to mention his ego," Hero added. "You forget the fatal conceit of these scientific chaps. They carry their god round with them. Its initials are Q.E.D., *Quod erat demonstrandum*. They worship scientific proof. And at the same time they can be deceived by a magician making an egg disappear. Constable is endeavouring to do what man has been striving for ever since he came down out of the trees—to banish death." Hero's gaze went to the two children in the photograph on the desk of the F.B.I. man, and Wiener followed its line with his eyes. Hero said, "Inside Samuel Constable's skull there is an extraordinary amount of grey matter, but his arms still yearn for the feel of his child. They have turned his own weapon against him and written Q.E.D. to the thing he wanted most—the resurrection of his child."

"And what do you propose to do?"

"Change the initials to N.E.D., *Nihil est demonstrandum*. Nothing has been proved."

Wiener said, "How?"

"If I can make a wax hand complete with finger-prints."

"If, if, if! Do you know how it is done?"

"No, but I'm going to find out. That's my business."

Wiener said, "All right. But I'd like you to arrange to take me to that seance next Monday night. I won't create a disturbance."

Hero said, "It will cost money. Particularly to arrange it without an interview with Bessmer first. I think that would be better."

Wiener said, "We've got money."

Hero agreed, "It's a deal!" And he felt, for the first time, that they might be working together.

Chapter 6

IN THE Manhattan directory Hero found what he was looking for. Cryder, Paul. Magic eqpt., 43A Cedar Street. On his way there, he recalled what he knew about the company.

It was perhaps the oldest firm in existence dealing in magical equipment and stage illusions. The Cryder firm had been founded in 1843 by Leon Cryderski, a Polish magician and sleight-of-hand artist, who gave exhibitions in New York and Philadelphia. When a theatre fire cost him the flexibility of his hands, he opened the Cedar Street shop, and his descendants had occupied the premises ever since. In the modern era, interest in magic shows had slackened off and Paul Cryder had doubtless fallen upon hard times.

Emerging from the subway into the canyon of Lower Broadway, Hero walked a block or two to Cedar Street. A backwash left behind by a city that had raced northward, Cedar Street contained dingy business premises, hardware stores and cafeterias. Cryder's had a sign painted in the script style of a century ago: *CRYDER'S MAGIC SHOP*. The windows were covered with grime and contained sneeze powder, false noses and moustaches, exploding cigars and tricks in dust-covered boxes. There was a fly-specked card: BE THE LIFE AND SOUL OF THE PARTY.

Hero went in, setting off the jangle of an old-fashioned bell attached to a spring above the door. The shop was narrow with a counter running its length to a curtained-off partition at the rear.

The curtain was pulled aside and a man entered. He was short and stout; a few sparse hairs were stretched across an all but naked skull, and he was wearing a green eyeshade and a black alpaca jacket with paper sleeves pulled over the forearms.

"Mr. Cryder? Paul Cryder?"

"Yup. What can I do for you?"

"My name is Alexander Hero. I'm over here from London on a visit. Phil Elliott, who has the magic shop in the Strand, sent me." He produced a membership card of the Inner Circle of the Magicians' Club of Great Britain.

"Phil sent you, did he? Are you a member of the profession?"

"Amateur," Hero said and added, "I need help."

Cryder said, "Well, well! I haven't seen Phil since shortly after the war. Come along in back and we'll see what we can do for you."

Behind the curtain was a warren of aisles and shelves with costumes and paraphernalia hanging from the ceiling. There was no doubt that Cryder could supply everything from self-lighting cigarettes to the machinery for vanishing an elephant. The space was half a dozen times the size of the shop. Here was money tied up, and Hero wondered what Cryder lived on.

In a corner was an old-fashioned roll-top desk, with an electric bulb and a green glass shade suspended over it from the ceiling. A swivel chair was in front of the desk and a straight one at the side. This was apparently Cryder's office. Deeper in the area, a flight of wooden steps led upstairs.

"Sit down," Cryder said. "Can I interest you in something?" Seating himself in the swivel chair, Cryder tilted backward and, using one foot as a lever, he kept moving the chair from side to side. The man was nervous.

"Well, yes," Hero said. "There's something in which I am interested, and I am prepared to pay for any information, or advice, you can give me as well as for the equipment."

"You'll get a right price. What's on your mind?"

Hero said succinctly, "I want to make a wax hand."

"You want to make a wax hand," Cryder repeated.

"Not solid," Hero said. "A glove cast in one piece."

"Not solid, a glove cast in one piece," echoed Cryder. "I guess that ain't too much of a problem. What's it for?"

"Materialization. Produced on the spot, with finger-prints of a person who is dead and buried. Do you think you could do it?"

"Do I think I could do it."

Hero suppressed his irritation at Cryder's habit of repetition. The little man sat in deep reflection. Suddenly the silence was shattered by the jangle of the shop bell.

Cryder started, leaped to his feet and said, "Excuse me," as he went out through the curtain.

Hero heard stiletto heel taps and a feminine voice, then Cryder saying, "We got a visitor, Tina!" And his voice dropped. Then the curtain was pushed aside and a girl preceded Cryder into the room.

Her eyes hit Hero so hard that he was left breathless. They were the colour of the clearest of aquamarines, enormous in a tiny, piquant face, beneath a thatch of lustrous, dark hair which she wore parted in the middle with two plaits coiled in large buns at either side of her head. The look she gave him on entering was challenging and appraising.

There are some encounters between male and female the conclusion of which is settled even before their hands have touched. Hero was stirred deeply when he saw the sudden glow in her eyes.

"My daughter, Tina," Cryder said.

Though tiny, she had an exquisite figure. She was like a little doll, except that her carriage and her expression were adult and feminine. She was a ripe woman and, to Hero, wholly desirable. Cryder completed the introduction: "Alexander Hero from London. A friend of Phil Elliott from the Inner Circle."

"Alexander Hero," Tina Cryder said, "I'm very happy to meet you." She looked up searchingly into his face.

Cryder said, "Mr. Hero's been asking about a wax hand for a materialization." As the girl turned to him with an inquiring glance he added, "All in one piece, like a glove, but with finger-prints."

Everyone was very still now.

"The finger-prints," Cryder concluded, "would be of someone who was dead and buried, like the spirit came back. Would you know of any stunt like that?" Turning to Hero he explained, "My daughter knows some of this stuff better than I do. She's travelled for years as a magician's assistant. The Great Scarlett. She was trained as a contortionist."

Tina said, "Oh, Father!" Hero had the impression that she was annoyed, and wondered why. "Have you tried our library?" she asked Paul Cryder sharply.

Her voice in asperity had an appealing breathy catch to it.

"No," Cryder said. "He's only just come here."

"Then we ought to try that first."

Cryder said, "Why don't you take him upstairs and fix him up with a drink, then we'll check?"

The stairs led to a large drawing-room with a grand piano. Tina's bedroom opened off it towards the front of the building. She disappeared into it for a moment, but left the door open, and he could see her arranging her hair. Another door towards the rear probably led to her father's room. She returned to the living-room and went to a cocktail cabinet, asking, "Scotch?" Her eyes looked upward at Hero, the ice-blue fire within them blazed and it started all over again—the entanglement, the excitement, the desire.

"Yes, please."

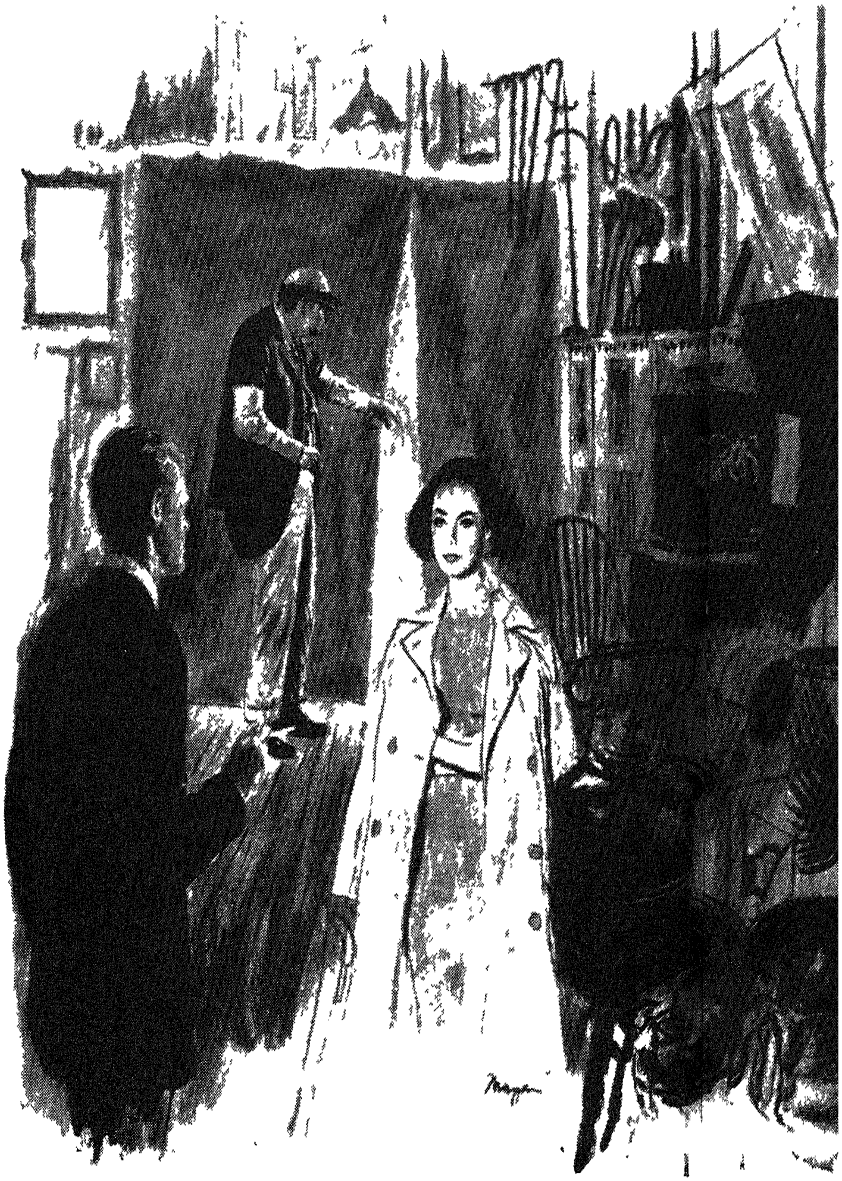
She poured the drink and brought it to him.

How old can she be? Hero thought. Twenty-seven? Twenty-eight? She will have to stand on tiptoe when she kisses me

"I'll go and help Father," she said.

She left, and Hero looked round the room. The walls were covered with signed photographs of famous magicians of the past. On the grand piano were two portraits. One of a magician in Chinese make-up was inscribed: *To Tina, who never missed a cue. Affectionately, Wang Fu.* The other was of the Great Scarlett and Tina, she wearing tights, holding his top-hat and wand. It was signed: *To Tina, with all my love. Will Scarletto.*

Wang Fu, actually the German Karl Boehmer, was one of the great illusionists, recently retired. He had performed cabinet, sword and



vanishing tricks. Glancing at the figure of the girl, Hero saw how perfect she would be for this work. Trained as a contortionist, she could roll herself up to fit into the tiniest places in the traps and boxes. And now that there were no longer elaborate magic acts, what? A strange pair, she and her father. Hero only knew that he wanted to see more of Tina Cryder. His first look into those astonishing eyes had driven every thought of Ruth Lesley and the girl who had all but seduced him in the dark of the cabinet out of his head.

THE LIBRARY, at the far end of the space behind the shop, contained thousands of volumes on magic. There father and daughter were snarling at one another. Paul Cryder was pale. "Who's the guy?" he demanded. "Is he a cop? What's he snooping round here for, asking about a hand with fingerprints of a dead one? You said there wouldn't be any trouble. Who's this Limey working for?" Then he added, "Who the hell are *you* working for?"

Tina Cryder's face was high-coloured with fury and the expression of her mouth was no longer pleasant.

"What do you care?" she cried. "You got paid, didn't you? Well, I'm getting mine."

Cryder's voice rose, tinged with hysteria. "I told you I don't want any trouble. I did a job for your friends, like I do for anyone in the business and ask no questions. Now this guy comes round and wants the same thing. I don't want any part of it."

Tina Cryder's face was a study in contempt. "You don't want trouble!" she spat at him. "Where would you be if I hadn't got you ten grand for the job? You keep your mouth shut and I'll find out about this guy."

Paul Cryder looked at his daughter, his glance burning with hostility. "Well, whatever you're up to, leave me out of it."

Tina did not reply. She was thinking of Peter Fairweather, the Englishman, his mouth and the hungry encirclement of his arms.

Cryder said, "What do we say to the guy?"

Tina Cryder mounted a travelling ladder and pulled down Price's *Fifty Years of Psychical Research*. "There's a picture of Kluski's glove in this," she said.

Cryder sniffed. "He'll know that one."

"That's just why I picked it," his daughter said.

Father and daughter returned with the volume and the news that there was nothing that gave any hint as to how a wax cast of the hand, complete with finger-prints, of a dead person might be produced under seance conditions. After Tina handed the book to Hero, he said, "I don't think the trick can be done, but a client of mine in London heard that a medium had produced such a materialization and asked me to check."

Paul Cryder's unhappy countenance lightened. He went to the cocktail cabinet, poured a drink and said, raising his glass, "Your health. Sorry we can't help you. You here for long?"

"Holiday," Hero said briefly and then turned to Tina Cryder. "I wonder," he said, "whether upon such short acquaintance it would be impertinent for me to ask you to show me something of New York one evening? Do you like to dance?"

Tina laughed deliciously and said, "I love it!"

"Tonight?"

Tina looked doubtful and regretful—"I'm not sure that I can."

"I'd like to take you dancing," Hero persisted.

"Perhaps I'll cancel my date then."

Paul Cryder said, rather heavy-handedly, "Tina'll show you the town. You'll enjoy yourself."

Hero arranged to call for the girl at eight o'clock.

On his way back uptown, he irritably considered the situation. He had been manoeuvred, pushed about. He had gone there seeking intelligence, and it seemed that he had given more than he had come away with and had been set up for further revelations.

Had he wasted time when he might have been doing something more promising? How much longer before Constable would react to the increasing pressure upon him? What if Mary Constable were not to appear at the next seance? Might it not trigger Constable into action—flight, or contact with the Russians?

Chapter 7

TINA CRYDER walked west on 29th Street towards Twelfth Avenue. Her brow was lined with worry but she knew no indecision. She received substantial weekly payments from a powerful secret organization. Those payments she now felt to be menaced.

She was intelligent enough to know the source of the funds she received and the aim of the conspiracy. She had closed her mind to this. She was looking after Tina Cryder. She had never been able to have the things she craved. She wanted money and when she craved something it was with an uncontrollable fury and greed; her desires knew no bounds.

She walked on towards Twelfth Avenue and the river, through a shabby, waterfront neighbourhood composed of old brick buildings used as warehouses, sweat-shops and small factories. At the south-west corner of Twelfth Avenue and 29th Street was one of the few remaining livery stables in New York. The entrance to the stables was on Twelfth Avenue and the office was on the corner of 29th Street.

Tina felt nervous. She had never gone there before unless she had been summoned. She went in. A man she knew only as Mike was sitting at a desk behind a wooden railing. He wore a bowler hat on the back of his head, a shirt without a collar, and an unbuttoned waistcoat. He looked up at her with hostility.

She said, "Is Mr. Kelly here?"

"No, he ain't."

"When will he be here? I've got to see him."

"I wouldn't know."

With an edge to her voice, she said, "Tell him it's important."

Mike said, "Take a walk, sister! Come back in an hour."

After an hour of aimless wandering about the waterfront, she returned to the office. Mr. Kelly was there. He was a swarthy, narrow-faced little man with nervous, tobacco-stained fingers, piercing eyes and a bitter mouth. His name certainly was not Kelly. He jerked his head towards the back door of the office. Tina went through it into the stables. Half a dozen horses were there in stalls and at the rear of the building were some unused delivery vans. A minute or so later Kelly came in. He climbed into one of the vans. Tina got in beside him.

Kelly said, "You were told never to contact us."

She said, "Something's happened. I thought I'd better tell you."

"O.K., spill it." Mr. Kelly talked with an accent.

"The Bessmers," she began, "took on a new sitter last night, an Englishman whose girl had died. His name was Peter Fairweather. They got me to kiss him and pretend I was his girl. They shook him down for twenty-five hundred."

"So what about him?"

"That isn't his real name. He came down to the shop today to see Father." She reached into her bag and produced a card. "This is his name: Alexander Hero. Father looked him up. He investigates seances for the British Society for Psychical Research."

"Go on," said Mr. Kelly.

"He was asking about a wax hand," Tina said.

Mr. Kelly uttered an obscenity. "How did you know him if all you did was smooch in the dark?"

"I had a look at him before the lights went out. I recognized him."

Kelly spat out of the window of the van. "Can you get any more dope on him?"

"I've got a date with him tonight. I'll find out more."

"Oh yeah? Maybe if he's handing out that kind of dough you'd like to have a bite yourself? Don't cross us, sister!"

"Don't be stupid!" Tina cried. "Why do you think I came to you?"

Mr. Kelly said, "O.K., see if you can pump him. Come in ten-thirty Monday morning and report. Now beat it!"

JANE CONSTABLE looked into her husband's study on her way to an evening of dinner and theatre with friends. It was nearing six o'clock. She was a tall, handsome woman with a broad, intelligent brow. Of late her husband, with the excuse of his work on the project, had neglected the social life and cultural interests they had enjoyed together. Jane Constable was uneasy, for she was well aware that work was not the whole story. She paused in the doorway. "Still working, Sam?"

He did not hear her. He was standing by the glass case, looking down upon the wax hand she hated. She was swept with revulsion. *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images,* she thought.

Constable broke out of his reverie and saw his wife. All his doubts and anguish of soul boiled up into anger against her inner calm. He said harshly, "Jane! I want you to do something for me."

She knew what was coming—dreaded it.

"Monday night I want you to come with me—to see our daughter."

"Sam, please don't ask me. You know I can't." Something within her, that last, intimate, closely guarded bit of self that must never be surrendered, forbade it.

"Would it hurt you for once to crack that cold, stubborn façade and go to your child?"

"Sam, please! Must we go through all this again?"

He glared at her savagely. "Why not? I tell you she's there! Don't you want to hear her voice again, feel the touch of her hand, her breath upon your face?"

"Sam!" she cried, and in her voice was mingled outrage and the anguish of a mother. "How can you? I hear her voice! I hear it every waking moment. I feel her touch! I bore her, Sam. I have never forgotten a gesture, a word, a caress. Sam, I beg of you! I have made my peace with death, can't you . . . ?"

He cut her off. "Don't you believe in *anything*?"

And because he was so angry, Jane Constable replied carefully, "I believe in a Higher Power we call God; that we come from Him and at our end return to Him and become a part of Him. I believe that that is where Mary is now. And that is where I want her to be. Her memory is alive within me. What proof do we need . . . ?"

Constable pointed to the wax hand. "That," he said. "She has come

back. There's no getting round it." He controlled his anger and said almost humbly, "Jane, please! I ask you—I beg you to come with me just this once. . . . I need you."

"Oh, Sam, why? Why do you want me to do this?"

"You'd *know* if she was there!" It was a groan, the truth forced agonizingly from him, the truth he had not meant to speak.

Was this a genuine cry for help? But no! She could not help him. What if she went and something were to take place there which would bring alive again the painful reality? The wax hand re-aroused all the antagonism and disgust she had felt when her husband first told her of going to a seance. She said, "I'm sorry, Sam. I can't."

The fire seemed to have been extinguished in him. "All right, Jane. I'll go it alone. Have a good time. I may be working late."

When she said good night his back was already turned.

He waited until he heard the front door close. Then he went to a wall safe from which he removed a number of loose-leafed note-books and several folded blue-prints. These he put into a small leather dispatch case. He hid the case at the bottom of a cupboard behind boxes and the folds of a coat. Then he put out the lights and went upstairs.

As THE CAB moved downtown, there arose a curious, singing excitement in Hero's breast. Whatever happened during the evening, it would have to be played by ear and he had better keep his wits about him.

At 43A Cedar Street he told the driver to wait and went inside with the jangling bell to announce him. He traversed the length of the shop and drew aside the curtained partition. There was light on the stairs leading to the upper floor and Tina's voice came floating down. "Almost ready. Do come up."

Hero went up to the drawing-room. Of Paul Cryder there was no sign. Tina's bedroom door was ajar, and while he waited and watched the reflection of her movements before a mirror, an uncontrollable excitement came to him.

And then she stood in the doorway, her hair upswept in a huge, burnished coil. She was wearing a light blue dinner dress, the silken material lustrous and whispering. The neckline was severe, straight across and high. Behind her, through the open door, was a full-length

mirror, and he could see the back of the frock was bare. Over her shoulder Hero glimpsed the foot of a large, frilly bed on which lay a pale blue nightdress, and once more he was filled with the thrill of promised conquest.

"You look charming," he said. "Where shall we go?"

"There's a restaurant called The Four Seasons. It's an experience if you've never been there before."

"Can one dance there?" Hero said.

"No. Afterwards, if you like, we can go on to El Morocco."

"What would I do without you?" he asked, and she laughed.

AT THE restaurant the *maître d'hôtel* said, his eyes estimating them, "Have you a reservation, sir?"

Hero said, "No, I'm sorry." A ten dollar bill showed from the corner of his hand.

"I think we can take care of you, sir."

Tina smiled and gave Hero's arm a small squeeze as they followed the head waiter to a discreet but important table.

They ordered Sevruga caviar and vodka. Tina's eyes reflected her delight in the elegance of the restaurant. They ordered baby spring lamb on a spit from the grill. A trolley of fresh vegetables was presented, and they chose from them with all the excitement of children.

Hero said, "You Americans know how to live."

Tina said, "So do you British. In London I used to love to go to the Savoy Grill after the show."

"With Will Scarletto?" Hero asked.

Tina affected not to notice that the question was pointed and merely replied, "Not always. I've a number of friends in London."

"I might have been one of them. Except that I was in Norfolk de-haunting someone's ancestral home at the time of the Great Scarlett's engagement. That was three years ago, wasn't it?"

Tina nodded. She was thinking: And who knows what would have happened if we had caught fire in the same way then. I might not be here, mired and frightened, a traitor and in trouble.

She murmured, "De-haunting houses? Is that what you do? I thought you were a magician."

"Strictly amateur sleight-of-hand, but I need it for my business. My job is to duplicate the tricks of my friends the mediums."

"Like making a wax glove?"

Hero laughed. "Oh," he scoffed, "you know very well that Harry Houdini and Joe Rinn exposed that years ago."

Tina was regarding him with a tiny smile that was half mocking. "All except the finger-prints," she said.

Hero shrugged. "There's probably a way of doing that too." His eyes met her own level gaze.

She laughed softly. "Is that what you are here to find out?"

"Good heavens, no! I've come over for a rest and a holiday. Sometimes my work gets a little strenuous." He pushed his cuff away from his right wrist, revealing the still purple scars where wire had cut into his flesh during an encounter with a charlatan, which had almost cost him his hand. Tina picked up his hand impulsively and softly pressed her lips to the scars. But she was thinking: Liar! You're here because of Constable and the Bessmers and Father and me. But I'm in love, and I'm going to have you, and after that Mr. Kelly can deal with it.

The caviar arrived in a block of ice carved to represent a sturgeon. The waiter spooned it out.

Hero said, "Tell me, where else have you been?"

"Oh, everywhere. Stockholm, Rome, Athens, Cairo, Istanbul. And to South America too, with Karl Boehmer, as long as engagements lasted. Then suddenly people didn't seem to care any more about seeing the lady vanish."

They ate and talked of the places they both knew, while the wines warmed them and their laughter became tinged with intimacy. When they emerged on to 52nd Street it was midnight. The air was cool and fresh, and they walked the few blocks to El Morocco, her hand in his, a restless little thing moving as though in response to her impulses.

They were seated at a zebra-covered banquette in the crowded night-club and Hero ordered champagne. The room was rocking with music, drums and people.

The waiter placed a silver bucket before them and uncorked the wine. Tina Cryder and Alexander Hero lifted their glasses in a silent toast and sipped, regarding one another over the rims.

Hero asked, "Shall we?" and arose. He was aware that his legs were trembling slightly. She slipped into his arms, and then they were moving on the jam-packed floor. Hero's lips brushed the thick, soft, fragrant hair. But they were only pushed and bumped by the bodies gyrating about them. They struggled back to their table, and Hero said, "I don't think I can take this. Can you?"

She shook her head.

Hero called for his bill, and they went out and into a taxi.

The cab had hardly drawn away when they were in one another's arms, lost to everything but the power of the attraction that had them in its grip. The cab had stopped at the shop at Cedar Street before they realized they were there. Hero handed the driver the fare and waved him away. They went in and Tina led the way through the partition and up the stairs.

Chapter 8

IT WAS after five o'clock in the morning, shortly before dawn, that Tina Cryder let Hero out of the shop and they parted with a final lingering kiss.

Back at his hotel, before he went to sleep, he had tried to encrust himself in a kind of mental armour, proof against the whisperings of conscience, memories, fears and reason.

He awoke well after midday to a sense of profound depression. It was pouring with rain outside. He reflected gloomily upon the consequences of his visit to the magic shop. For if it was true, as he now surmised, that Tina Cryder was not only the materialization of Ruth Lesley, but of Mary Constable as well, then she would know that Alexander Hero and Peter Fairweather were one and the same person. His cover would be broken and his usefulness to Ferguson, Wiener and Operation Foxglove at an end.

But there was actually not an iota of proof or tangible evidence that the girl in the cabinet or the Constable child was Tina Cryder. She was tiny enough for Mary Constable, and she was an actress and probably a mimic. And as for the tall girl in the cabinet, height was an easy illusion to create in darkness.

Why not wait and see what developed at the seance tomorrow night? He had promised Wiener to arrange to take him. That was the next order of business. He had his breakfast and dressed, then took a cab to the house on West 91st Street.

The blinds of the front parlour were drawn, although it was early in the afternoon. Standing in the vestibule, waiting for the doorbell to be answered, Hero realized that the F.B.I. men would be shooting with their telescopic lens from a brownstone house opposite. He wondered whether he would be able to spot the camera they used at night. He looked up to the ceiling of the vestibule, but saw nothing except a discoloration at one end of the moulding where two small ends of wire hung loose.

The door was finally opened by Bessmer himself.

"Friend Fairweather," he boomed, "an unexpected visitor, but always a pleasure. I hope it isn't distress which brings you to our door-step on this day of rest and prayer? Come in." Bessmer's face was flushed and he seemed nervous and distracted.

In the front hall Hero was about to turn into the parlour when Bessmer said, "No, no. Not in there. Mother is resting." And he led the way towards the seance room.

Mother didn't seem to be resting, Hero thought. He had caught a glimpse of her and Pratt at the table, bending over a small black object about the size of a matchbox.

The door at the end of the corridor opened into the seance room, now furnished as a parlour. "You sit here while I see if Mother's all right," Bessmer said.

Hero heard Bessmer go into the front room, then the murmur of voices. At no time did Hero stir from his chair, yet by the time Bessmer returned he had the room eye-measured and analysed and was fairly certain of the entrance and exit from the cabinet.

There was a rectangle of steel curtain rail screwed into the ceiling. No tell-tale signs of a trap-door there. The break-front bookcase along the side of the room was too far from the cabinet. The parquet floor was covered by several small Turkish rugs where the cabinet had been. The rest of the floor was covered by a large Oriental carpet. That, of course, would be it. One of the Turkish rugs flipped back, the trap-door

opened, the small figure of a girl who had once been a contortionist whipped through it with lightning speed. Later, if anyone were curious enough to look beneath the rug, there would be only the grooving of the parquet floor to be seen.

Bessmer entered the room. He seemed to have composed himself.

"Now, Fairweather, in what manner can we serve you?"

"I have a friend," Fairweather began tentatively. "I should like your permission to bring him to the seance tomorrow night."

"Any friend of yours is a friend of ours," intoned Bessmer.

"He's a lawyer I've known for years. He often comes to England. Last night he managed to irritate me beyond endurance. I had told him of my extraordinary experience with you. He laughed at me. I'd give"—he hesitated—"well, quite something to make a convert of him."

Bessmer rose to this bait and the flare of greed shone in his eyes. "Your friend will be welcome in our circle," he said.

Hero, with an air of innocence, sketched in Wiener's Seneca heritage.

When Bessmer had pumped him dry, he smoothly changed the subject. "Friend Fairweather, what would you say our reception would be if Mother and I decided to visit your country?"

The question so startled both Hero and Fairweather that neither replied immediately. Hero thought: I'll be blowed! The nervousness, the little black box and the busted wires, are you and Mum getting ready to do a bunk?

"Why, yes, of course—I'm sure you would be welcome."

Bessmer went all creamy and smooth. "Shall we say nothing further about this to anyone until we decide to visit your shores?"

Hero nodded and took up his hat to go.

"I hope we shall be able to have a demonstration for your friend," Bessmer said. They walked to the front door. Hero was able to keep his eyes from the roof of the vestibule, but Bessmer darted a quick glance upward.

ON MONDAY morning Tina Cryder once more sat in the van at the back of the livery stable, with Mr. Kelly and a Mr. O'Brien, who spoke mostly in monosyllables from the van's interior, addressing himself to the backs of Mr. Kelly and Tina. Mr. O'Brien looked as though he had

descended from one of those group photographs taken on the Kremlin balcony. He was four-square, with a head like a cube, short, bristling hair and little pig's eyes.

With O'Brien behind them, Mr. Kelly interrogated Tina.

"O.K., what did you find out? Who's he working for?"

"He said he was here on holiday. But he's lying."

"Does he suspect you have broken his cover?"

"No."

"When he comes to the seance tonight, will he enter the cabinet?"

"I'm sure he will—if only to maintain his cover."

"And what are your instructions from the Bessmers?"

"To give him some more lovin', is the way Bessmer put it."

Mr. O'Brien grunted with satisfaction. "Good. Now here, take this. Do not turn round. Put your hand behind you."

A small object was thrust into Tina's hand. When she looked at it, it proved to be a small gold band with an attachment that was embedded in a cork.

"Put the ring in your handbag and listen to me carefully," said Mr. O'Brien. "When you go into the cabinet tonight, you will be wearing the ring on the third finger of your right hand. Do not remove the cork until this man approaches. Then pull it off. There is a needle attached to the ring. When he enters the cabinet embrace him. Your right hand will rest at the base of his neck. Press the needle home. Be very, very careful not to prick yourself."

The full implication of her instructions made Tina feel ill and frightened. She felt herself sinking into a dark well of terror and she cried, "I won't do it! Take it back. I won't touch it!"

Mr. O'Brien remained calm. "I am afraid that you have no choice. You are an intelligent girl, which is why you work for us. There will be no danger to you, unless you disobey."

She heard Mr. O'Brien leaving the van. Kelly said, "Do what he told you, sister. I wouldn't monkey about." He climbed down from the front seat. "You stay here until you're told to go."

Sitting by herself in the semi-gloom of the stable, Tina was cold with fear. What had appeared to be a safe enough and profitable caper into which she had gone with her eyes open had suddenly developed into



something deadly. She was being asked to kill the man who had held her in his arms the night before.

She screwed her eyes shut in an attempt to shut out the horror. Someone touched her and she screamed, and then choked off the cry. It was Mike, the man with the bowler hat from the front office. He said, "You can beat it now."

She hurried away, clutching her handbag, sick with the knowledge of what it contained.

Chapter 9

HERO AND Saul Wiener were on the way to the Bessmers for the seance.

"Nervous?" Hero asked.

"Frankly, yes."

Hero said, "It's a sensible approach. I always am. Tonight let me quote you something. It's from *The Secrets of Houdini*, by a man named Cannell. It goes roughly like this: 'There is no darkness like that of a seance room and no atmosphere which can compare with it. After an hour in dark and silence even a highly sceptical person often becomes susceptible and finds himself thinking that there may be something in it. The creation of this atmosphere is part of the medium's business. Those taking part in the seance are, generally, at the lowest ebb of their powers of critical observation when the manifestations begin.'"

Wiener grinned and said, "Are you still susceptible?"

"Invariably during a first visit, and when I meet something new."

"But this is your second visit."

"Exactly," Hero assented. "So I shall be having a bit of a look round. Mother uses infra-red and special glasses to keep from tripping over her sitters' feet when she is on the prowl playing 'spirit.'" He produced a small, black tube from his pocket and said, "This is a bit more modern than hers. It's called black light. You chaps used it on your sniperscopes in Korea. I'm hoping to get a look at Ruth Lesley and Mary Constable. Incidentally," he added, "I suppose you know the Bessmers have had a bad scare. They've come across one of your little boxes."

Wiener looked annoyed. "Yes. No more night pictures. Do you know what happened? It was just bad luck. A sparrow got trapped inside the vestibule and was raising a kerfuffle. Bessmer, the old woman and Pratt all came out to see what was up. We had the infra-red lamp pretty well concealed, but messing about the ceiling with a broom, trying to clear out the sparrow, they found it."

Hero asked, "Wouldn't they expect to be under surveillance?"

"Yes, but it's always a nasty shock when you have it verified."

The cab drew up at No. 12A West 91st Street, behind another one that was discharging a passenger. It was Professor Constable.

Constable said, "Oh, Fairweather! Nice to see you."

"Professor Constable, Saul Roth," Hero said. "Roth is a lawyer and -a sceptic."

Constable acknowledged this with a grunt. As the front door opened for them, they could hear the booming voice of Bessmer: "Prepare yourselves, folks. Mother feels the power tonight."

Bessmer came to the parlour door. "Friend Fairweather! A real pleasure to have you with us again. And this will be your friend, Mr. Roth. I hope, sir, you will be able to experience something with us here tonight which will lead you upward and onward."

When the partitioning doors were rolled back, the black-draped cabinet and the circle of chairs were as they had been before. This time Wiener was placed between Bessmer and Woodmanston, the position that Hero had occupied originally, while he was put at Woodmanston's right with Weitzenkorn on his other side. Constable was slumped in his usual chair.

Mrs. Bessmer came in looking grim. "Let's get on with it," she said.

Pratt whipped back the curtains of the cabinet, showing the same arrangement of paraphernalia on the table.

Woodmanston arose from his chair. Bessmer said to Wiener, "Might you like to accompany him, friend Roth, and observe him as he ties Mother to her chair?"

Wiener followed Woodmanston to the cabinet, where the latter began to bind Mrs. Bessmer to her chair. Wiener was surprised at the thoroughness of the job. He said to Woodmanston, "That rope is cutting into her flesh there."

Sarah Bessmer said, "If it'll get you into the church, I won't have suffered in vain."

The two men returned to their seats. Bessmer called, "Join hands, friends. Pray. Open your minds." They linked hands. Pratt closed the curtains of the cabinet, then took up his position by the gramophone. "Lights out," Bessmer cried. The seance room was plunged into total darkness.

Fairweather gripped the moist hands of the men on either side of him. His palms were sweating too. The hunt was on in earnest now. Before long, when he gathered his dead fiancée into his arms, he would definitely know.

In another part of the house, Tina Cryder waited for the signal to carry out her assignment. On the third finger of her right hand she wore the gold band. She was lost, caught up, trapped. There was no more that she could do than she had done. . . .

THE DARKNESS folded about Saul Wiener and he set about manufacturing resistance to whatever manifestation there would be. They sat in complete silence, waiting. Wiener heard the ticking of his wristwatch, the beating of his heart and the muffled noises of the city outside. Once he had waited, unafraid, in a dark cellar for a killer to move and shoot it out with him. What was he waiting for here? He didn't believe in ghosts, or spirits, or the dead returning.

He was straining his senses now—his eyes to catch any faint glimmer, his ear to pick up so much as a scratch of sound. A cold wind suddenly blew on his face; something icy touched him. He cried out in spite of himself. Bessmer held his hand tightly and whispered, "Shhh! Don't worry. The spirits are all lovin'."

Bessmer shouted, "Music, Pratt. All join in, and help the power come into Mother."

The silence was shattered by "Onward Christian Soldiers" and Wiener felt himself caught in the rhythm and the urge to let out his lungs and sing along with them until anger at himself brought him back to his senses.

Now, a most unholy row, an overpowering clatter of tambourine and trumpet blasts, thumps and bangs and groans topped the singing and

the gramophone music. A faint, reddish glow dispelled some of the darkness from the area of the cabinet, and Wiener saw the curtains swaying and billowing outward.

Bessmer shouted suddenly, "The power is strong on Mother tonight. Don't anybody move." The light faded, leaving green images on the retina of the eye. From the cabinet a voice spoke, "How! Me here, Big Chief Thundering-Cloud." The sitters uttered answering cries of "How" and Wiener felt that he ought to be laughing, but somehow there was no laughter in him.

Bessmer intoned, "What spirits are coming through tonight, Big Chief? Who are they asking for?"

"One spirit of my own people. She speak." Then a soft voice, young and low, whispered, "Na-no-gon-ta-wah," twice repeated.

"What's that?" said Bessmer sharply. "Who are you?"

Wiener said aloud, "My God! That's my Indian name!"

"Is that you, friend Roth?" came Bessmer's voice. "Hold fast then; don't break the chain. Say who you are, spirit."

Unintelligible words replied out of the darkness, "*Nene tentatsitsane-ḳare ḳahniḳ tenḳanietahḳwe*," unintelligible to all but Wiener who listened to someone saying in the Seneca language that she was the First-Flower-That-Comes-After-the-Snow.

Confusion was mounting in Wiener. There was not a chance in a million of the Bessmers' hitting upon his ancestor by accident. He croaked a few words towards the dark patch whence the speech was coming.

The reply came drifting back faintly. "*Onen ḳi wahi ḳwienah ne onḳwanaḳeraserakon, aontaskwehtahḳwe*—Good-bye, son of our tribe. Believe in us."

Saul Wiener felt cold and a little sick. What shook him was that, waiting there in the dark, he *had* been thinking of his Indian ancestress, almost as a challenge to these fakers. The communication had been a shock. If there were such a thing as an after-life, why should his aborigine forebear wish to communicate with him; but on the other hand why should she not? With humiliation and anger he realized that the result of all this hocus-pocus had been to let the word "if" creep in. He listened now to the simperings of little Princess Devi,

marvelling how grown people could stomach such trash, yet finding himself weighing the messages and wondering what germs of truth they contained.

Suddenly Devi, with a rattling of the tambourine, announced the presence of the spirit fiancée of Peter Fairweather. At the first seductive call of Fairweather's name Wiener remembered that, whatever else had taken place tonight, this was an incontrovertible fraud.

"Peter, I'm here. Dear Peter!"

Wiener heard Hero's chair scrape as he stood up. Then he heard Fairweather say, "Ruth! Oh, dear God! Ruth!" The Englishman uttered a half sob and moved in the direction of the cabinet.

And now the trap was ready to be sprung. In a few seconds, Hero would be able to see the person who was speaking. The room was silent. Wiener hardly heard the breathing of the sitters, raptly witnessing this occult love story. By the faint red illumination he could just make out the figure of the man moving into the area of the curtains. It paused there for an instant.

"Ruth! Ruth! Are you there?"

"Oh, Peter! Peter!"

This was the love cry of a woman, wrung from her throat before the moment when she would melt into the arms of her man, and everyone in the room who had ever loved recognized and thrilled to it. There was silence again, then the thud of a falling body.

Wiener saw in the red incandescence that Hero had fallen to his knees before the cabinet and had buried his face in his hands. He was groaning, "I can't! No more, no more!"

What the devil! Wiener thought. Is he funking it?

The soft voice called, "Peter, my dearest, come to me!"

"Ruth, no! I can't. I had no right to call you back. We must leave one another in peace."

Wiener's nerves were tingling at the mystery of the double drama, the play within the play, and he was conscious of some kind of deadly duel.

"Go back, Ruth. Some day I'll come to you."

"Won't you say good-bye, Peter?"

"Good-bye, Ruth!"

Wiener saw that Hero, still on his knees, was not going to enter the cabinet. Something had gone wrong. Wiener's left hand was being crushed by Arnold Bessmer.

Softer and more distant came the voice of Ruth Lesley. "Good-bye then, Peter. Good-bye."

The tambourine rattled faintly, succeeded by strangled moans from the cabinet. Bessmer called hoarsely, "Are you all right, Mother?"

The tambourine banged, the accordion wheezed a snatch of melody. Wiener felt Bessmer's grip relax and at the same time saw the outline of Hero's figure shambling back through the darkness to the circle of chairs. He sat down and took the hands of those on either side of him.

Why had Hero not entered the cabinet? What had been the meaning of that idiotic drama he had staged? Princess Devi interrupted Wiener's reflections, lisping, "Pwofessor Constable, are you there?"

"I'm here."

Wiener shifted to try to see him, but the red bulb had been extinguished and the room was smothered in impenetrable blackness.

"Mary's not coming tonight." There was a kind of petulant arrogance in the baby voice as Devi made the announcement.

"Why not? Where is she?" Constable demanded.

"She's gone far, far away. Maybe she won't ever be coming back. Ooh, poor Mary, it's cold and dark where she is."

"What's that? Damn it, you go get her! I want her!"

To Wiener the seance had taken on the quality of a nightmare.

"Mary is far away," said little Devi. "She can't come."

The noise of the chair told Wiener that Constable had risen. He bawled into the darkness, "You—get out, you imbecile! Mrs. Bessmer, get Mary! You've got the power!"

Wiener felt as though he could take no more of this exposure of a human soul—Samuel Hale Constable pleading with that dreadful woman for a ghost.

The tambourine rattled, the bells jingled. "Perhaps some day," sang little Devi. "Perhaps never. Good-bye, good-bye."

Something white and luminous appeared from the direction of the cabinet for a moment and waved uncertainly. The clatter began again, then diminished, receding as though the company of spooks, bag and

baggage, were taking their departure. Mrs. Bessmer began to gag and her husband shouted, "Lights, Pratt!"

The blaze of electric bulbs smote their retinas, half blinding Wiener. But he could see, as the black-curtained cabinet fell, Mother Bessmer, purple-faced, straining against her bonds. And glancing at Hero he saw him, still holding hands, left and right, his head sunk on to his chest, his eyes unseeing.

Chapter 10

THERE WAS no enthusiasm evident at the ghastly after-seance collation. Mrs. Bessmer pleaded fatigue and vanished. Bessmer said to Wiener, "I hope you're satisfied, Mr. Roth. Is there someone in your family of Indian blood?"

"Possibly," Wiener replied curtly.

Turning to Hero, Bessmer said, "You disappointed me, friend Fairweather. We don't like Mother using the power for nothing. Does that mean we shan't be seeing any more of you here or . . . elsewhere?"

Fairweather said, "No, no! I'm sorry. I was upset."

Bessmer, who seemed uneasy, turned away, and the company broke up. Wiener and Hero hailed a cab. "I think, perhaps, we'd better have a drink," Hero said.

Wiener replied, "You bet!" and said to the driver, "Lindy's."

The large Broadway restaurant was a bedlam. Hero acknowledged that Wiener's choice of place was clever. In the booth where they sat there was no chance of their being overheard. "How did you like the seance?" Hero asked.

Wiener replied, "I didn't. I wish I hadn't gone!"

Hero threw him a half-mischievous glance and said, "The shaking tent of the Ojibwas still works, doesn't it?"

Wiener said with a kind of controlled fury, "Where did the Bessmers get the information about my ancestors?"

"I told them. When I arranged with Bessmer to accept you for the seance, I leaked the information. A couple of hours in the Public Library would yield enough Seneca phrases for a seance."

Wiener was genuinely angry. "*You* told him!"

Hero said equably, "Every magician needs a confederate or two. Harry Houdini sometimes had a half dozen. He wouldn't have been able to effect a single escape without their aid."

Wiener was still glaring, but some of the fire was dying from his gaze. Hero said, "If I hadn't told you, you'd always have had some kind of doubt about the hereafter, wouldn't you?"

The anger in Wiener had been replaced by a kind of frank interest. "Like our friend Constable?"

"Like our friend Constable."

"I suppose I asked for that object lesson," Wiener said.

"What was your overall impression?" Hero asked.

"Most of it was corny as hell," Wiener said, "and behind the corn there was something very nasty. What were they up to? Why didn't you go into the cabinet to meet your girl friend?"

Hero reached into his inside pocket and produced a handkerchief, flat and carefully folded, and handed it to Wiener. Within it was a sheet of paper, torn from a DON'T FORGET pad. The scrawled message read: *Don't go into the cabinet tonight. No matter what happens, don't go in. Your life is in danger. Don't ignore this warning!*

"It was stuffed into my pocket in the dark."

The note had been placed on him swiftly and efficiently. He had felt someone reach over his shoulder and slip something into his breast pocket early in the seance. Hero had had to wait until his hands were free to read the message. Once he was up and on his way to the cabinet, he had put the note to the scrutiny of his special eyeglass lens. As he had expected, the vicinity of the cabinet was bathed in infra-red rays, and he was able to discern the warning.

Either the note was designed to keep him from danger which threatened him within the cabinet, or the intention was merely to keep him from scrutinizing and possibly identifying Ruth Lesley.

Who had planted the note? Tina? Mother? Someone unknown? If they were trying to frighten him off, it was his duty to go in and carry out his plan. But it was also his duty to stay alive to prevent the defection of Constable and the collapse of Operation Foxglove.

His final decision had come about through a premonition that if he went in he would die.

He re-wrapped the note in the clean handkerchief. "Would you put your finger-print man on to that?" he said to Wiener.

"Whose do you think might be there?"

For a moment Hero was on the verge of confessing to the night on Cedar Street and sending Wiener's men down there to collect the Cryders. They could then search the place to look for a hidden laboratory or equipment that might have produced the hand.

Yet what if all they picked up was a down-at-the-heels magic merchant and his pretty daughter? He said, "I don't know, but my hunch is that before long they'll match up."

Wiener said, "You heard the last message to Constable?"

"I did."

Wiener went on. "It said, 'You go and sing to the Russians, or you'll never see Mary Constable again.' The Bessmers must have spilt that we were photographing their house and so the trap has been sprung. Tomorrow we pick up Constable, Bessmer and company, the lot, and put them under lock and key."

"And Operation Foxglove?"

Wiener said with scorn in his voice, "How would *you* like to have to make the decision—whether nobody gets the secret or the Russians get the secret away from us? I've made mine."

Hero said, "Give me twenty-four hours. If by then I haven't"

Wiener said, "The Russian Mission offices open at nine."

"If I can keep him from defecting for another day . . . ?"

Weiner pointed a long, bony finger."If you're keeping something from me and this thing blows up, I'll have your neck."

Hero drained his glass and put it down. "I thought you chaps made bloody sure before you pulled the trigger. All right, you know your business. But I'm going to notify Dr. Ferguson that my usefulness here is at an end."

Hero saw a change come over Wiener. "Are you sure that you can keep Constable on ice for twenty-four hours?" he asked.

Hero snapped, "You want everything in black and white. I think I can. If my scheme doesn't come off, you can take Constable."

Wiener said, "I'd like to go to Washington and have a word with Ned Philbrick, my boss, and Walter Augstadt, as well as J. Edgar."

"And get the load off *your* shoulders?" Hero put in.

Wiener was suddenly human again. "Well, wouldn't you? But what will you do? Can I know that?"

"Tell Constable I've had a message from his daughter," Hero replied. "If necessary produce one in his home for him."

Wiener looked at his watch and said, "I'll catch the next plane to Washington. But you're agreed, if Constable so much as sticks his nose out of the house we take him?"

"Yes."

Wiener called for the bill. He said, "And if after twenty-four hours you haven't" He left the sentence hanging.

Shrugging, he excused himself and left to make a telephone call. When he returned they went out into the street. He said, "I've made arrangements. Constable's house will be covered. And a man will meet me at the airport to pick up that note for Ferris to test for prints." He hailed a cab, and stood with his hand on the door. "I wish you weren't so damn secretive. Keep in touch with my office. Sullivan can reach me at any time."

THE NIGHT operator at the hotel said, "Worth two, one, three, ni-yen, seven doesn't answer, Mr. Hero. Do you want me to try again later?"

Half relieved, half disturbed that the Cryders' number did not answer, Hero replied, "No, thank you. Will you try this number instead, please?" and he gave Constable's number.

There were six rings, apparently leading to a "No answer" and the collapse of his plans, then he heard Constable's voice saying, "Well?"

"This is Fairweather, Professor."

"Yes, Fairweather?" There was no warmth in the voice.

Fairweather, the weak, somewhat confused Englishman, had to hook Constable now. He began, "I've just had a tremendous experience, sir" He hesitated.

"Is it something that has to be discussed at half past one in the morning?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't realize how late I couldn't wait. When I came home after the seance tonight I tried to get through."

"Tried to get through where?"

"To Ruth."

"I thought you were through with that," Constable said coldly.

"It's the Bessmers," Fairweather said. "I can't stomach them. And when I'd sent Ruth away, I couldn't bear it either, so I sat in the dark and tried to reach her. And then it happened."

"May I ask what this has to do with me?"

"Only this, sir. While I was trying to get Ruth . . . while she was there . . . Mary . . . your daughter came through!"

"WHAT?" Constable shouted "What's that you say?"

"Your daughter, she was there . . . her voice . . . her presence "

"Did she say anything?"

"Yes. She said, 'Tell Daddy' "

Hero then gave a demonstration of a man on the verge of hysterics of which the Cambridge Dramatic Society would have been proud. "I don't know exactly . . . I couldn't hear. Ruth was there for a moment and then they were both gone. I felt ill. Perhaps I passed out for a while. I didn't know it was so late. But I had to tell you. Maybe if we tried together, she would"

Professor Constable's voice now burned with eagerness. He said, "Yes, yes, of course. Get in a cab and come here."

Peter Fairweather dissolved into a babble of incoherence. He said, "I can't. My nerves are gone. You don't know what it's like I can't any more tonight. Tomorrow"

"All right then, come up tomorrow. Nine in the morning."

"Nine o'clock. I'll be there." And the connection was broken.

Professor Constable was on ice for that night.

He called Tina Cryder's number again. The number rang and rang and finally the operator said, "Still no answer."

Hero replied, "Thank you. We'll close down for the night, then. Put a 'Don't disturb' on until eight."

It was shortly before two o'clock in the morning. He searched in his bag for his skeleton keys, a duplicate of a set made for Harry Houdini, which would open almost any standard, old-fashioned lock. He picked up his sniperscope, gloves and a small electric torch, put on his jacket and went out. He walked swiftly the three blocks to Grand Central Station and caught a downtown subway.

Cedar Street was as empty as a stage set after the actors have departed. He reconnoitred the magic shop from the far side of the street. There was a naked bulb burning inside the dusty window, but no light issued from behind the curtains of Tina's room above.

He crossed over, drew on his gloves and gently tried the handle of the shop door. It did not give. His skeleton keys would be of no avail against the Yale lock on the outside. However, the lock looked old, and probably much of the resistance had gone out of the spring. He forced a thin, stiff piece of celluloid into the crack of the door where the catch would be and pressed. It yielded and he pushed the door open an inch at a time, entered the shop, and closed the door behind him. The spring bell suspended over the entrance had given out one faint *tonk* which, to his ears, sounded like Big Ben.

He was now in the light of the bulb over the counter, visible from the outside. Walking as silently as he could on boards that groaned and creaked at every step, he passed through the curtained partition into the darkness behind it. He now took out his sniperscope and found the stairs. Cautiously testing each board, he mounted them.

In the living-room he could see that the door of both Tina's room and her father's room stood ajar. He crept over to the door leading to her father's. The sniperscope showed him a large bed and the outline of a man apparently sitting up. Hero experienced a moment of panic. Was Paul Cryder propped up in bed, his finger on the trigger of a gun.

He pushed on the button of his torch. The face and the sitting figure of Paul Cryder leapt out of the darkness, his eyes staring into the light with a look of intense surprise. He did not speak or cry out.

Then Hero saw that the man was dead.

Hero tiptoed to the bedside, stripped off his glove and felt for a pulse. There was none. He quickly replaced his glove. There was a bluish tinge to Cryder's lips and a lividness of the cheeks, indicative of lack of oxygen, resulting from suffocation or from certain forms of heart attack. He bent over the corpse again. There was a discoloration, an oval patch of faint stain on the breast, just below the chin. He leaned closer and sniffed at the mouth of the dead man. Bitter almonds?

He felt himself go cold. He snapped off the torch and made his way quickly across to Tina's room to find what surely must await him. She

lay stretched out on her back, her dark hair flowing across the pillow. There was no blood, only the cyanosed lips and the flushed face. She had been killed in her sleep.

The Cryders had been executed. A man had let himself into the shop and gone upstairs to find Paul Cryder in bed reading. Before he could move or cry out, there had been a hiss as a pistol discharged a spray of potassium cyanide in his face. Cryder's sharp intake of breath as he gasped in fright would have drawn the spray into his lungs. Death would have been instantaneous. Tina had not even been awakened. When the second barrel was discharged into her lungs, death had come simply as a transition from sleep.

But why the death sentence? Searching for the answer, Hero came upon one so horrible that he could hardly bear to entertain it. The note thrust into his pocket during the seance entreating him not to enter the cabinet! Had she traded her life for his? Had she known of a plot to kill him; had she been an instrument of that plot, and sought to avoid her part in it by the note?

The Russians then had known that their orders had been disobeyed. Tina Cryder was a risk they no longer could afford and her father as well. Hero looked down upon the shell that had harboured the mystery that was Tina Cryder, and felt a wave of pity. He moved his torch about the room. The beam crossed her boudoir table with its jars and scent containers. One was a black bottle of extraordinary shape, encrusted with silver moons and stars. He unstoppered it with his gloved hand and in an instant he was carried back to the moment in the cabinet when he had held "Ruth Lesley" in his arms. The label on the bottle read "Music of the Stars."

He replaced the container and turned for a farewell glance at Tina's face. She was dead and he was alive, yet how long would he survive the order of execution that must have been issued for him as well? The realization turned him cold. Standing there, with the torch in his hand, he might be a target at that very moment and he extinguished it swiftly.

But there still remained a task that he must face. He must search the premises for something that might shed light upon the hand of Mary Constable. Using only his sniperscope, Hero crept downstairs and forced himself to examine the premises behind the shop.

Deep in the storeroom, he picked out the shape of a bulky figure standing motionless at the side of the aisle. He froze, filling his lungs with all the air he could gulp, so that should a deadly spray be discharged in his face he would not draw it into his lungs. The figure remained as motionless as he. He waited until his wire-taut nerves could tolerate no more. He switched on his light and flashed it upon a yellow, hideously grinning Chinaman. But to Hero he looked like an angel from heaven. It was an automaton, of a kind that was popular in magic shows of the Victorian era. He felt weak. He sat down upon the floor for a moment and tried to laugh himself into some courage.

Thereafter things went better, but he found nothing. There was no laboratory, secret chamber, or equipment to indicate that the hand of Mary Constable might have been manufactured there.

He pocketed his torch and sniperscope, made his way stealthily out of the shop, pulling the door to, but not quite shut—his way of alerting the police—and walked swiftly to the subway.

It was just past two-thirty when he disembarked at Grand Central Station. On reaching his hotel room he headed for the telephone. It was time to bring Saul Wiener into the picture. The operator came on with a "Still up, Mr. Hero?" and he replied, "Can't sleep. I've got a toothache," and gave the emergency number with which Wiener had provided him.

After the first ring a voice replied, "Sullivan speaking."

"This is Alexander Hero. What are the chances of getting in touch with Mr. Wiener?"

"He's still *en route*. Are you in trouble?" Sullivan asked sharply.

Hero said, "No, but I'd like to get a message to him. Would you tell him that I suggest he return immediately."

"We'll do that," Sullivan said. "You wouldn't care to tell us what this is all about? In case Mr. Wiener"

"Thank you, no. I prefer to discuss it with him personally."

Hero hung up and, without warning, his lie to the operator about the toothache became an agonizing, throbbing reality.

From the rhythmical pulsation of pain in his jaw he knew that this one wasn't going away. The excruciating pain sent him tottering to a chair where he collapsed. He could no longer think about anything but

escape from the hot poker that was being thrust through his cheek at ten-second intervals.

His problem was how to survive until he could get to the dentist. He made his way to the bathroom, where he swallowed four aspirin tablets, without hope that they would do much good, but with whisky they might do the trick. But Room Service was suspended. The thing to do was to go out and get a couple of drinks and then sit on Dr. Hofstetter's door-step until he appeared.

Hero shaved and changed his shirt to make himself presentable for the doctor later that morning.

From the lift boy he received directions to the nearest bar. The hotel lobby was deserted, the desk clerk having disappeared momentarily, and Hero didn't bother to drop his room key on the counter. His mind was on the oasis, and he walked the short distance to the neon sign advertising the good news that O'Danahey's Bar and Grill was open.

Going in, Hero clutched the polished mahogany and croaked to the barman. "Double bourbon."

Hero had the drink in his hands before it touched the bar, and knocked it back. The barman goggled.

"Toothache." Hero's eyes were watering.

The man clucked sympathetically and produced some tablets from a box. "Here, try a couple of these." Hero swallowed them and sipped a second drink more slowly.

"What time your dentist open up?" the man asked.

"Nine o'clock, I hope." Hero suddenly gasped.

"Want another shot?" the barman asked solicitously.

"No, no, it's something else." At nine o'clock Hero was due at Constable's house to produce a message from his dead child. "I've just remembered. Got an appointment at nine o'clock. Can't afford to turn up there blotto."

"Brother," said the barman, "you're in a fix. Say! Why don't you go to the movies? Maybe one of them grind houses over on West Forty-second Street."

He thanked his adviser, paid the bill, and taxied over to West 42nd Street where, for eighty-five cents, he bought a ticket admitting him to four uninterrupted hours of horror films.

Chapter 11

THE BARMAN had been right. The idiocy unreeling across the screen did somehow fix his attention for a time. Furthermore, Hero managed to achieve an hour's snooze which left him slightly refreshed. When he awoke he looked at his watch and saw that it was eight o'clock.

He emerged from the theatre, blinking in the daylight. He had his breakfast at a cafeteria on Eighth Avenue. The tooth was still reporting regularly with hammer blows, but his concern of the moment was what he was going to do for Constable. He had an almost limitless bag of tricks used in demonstrations of the crookedness of mediums, but many of them required preparation and were fairly transparent. Constable had not fallen for the business until he had been offered the complex trick he considered "proof."

At twenty minutes to nine, Hero boarded the uptown I.R.T. subway. Between 103rd and 110th streets the train suddenly slowed to a crawl and then stopped. Such waits were also a part of London's transport system, but when his watch told him it was one minute to nine and they were still standing in a darkened tunnel, he began to fret helplessly about what Professor Constable might do when he was not there at nine. What if he thought Hero wasn't coming and headed for the Russian Mission? Then Wiener's men would jump him.

Hero sweated the minutes out in an agony of tension. At half past nine the car began to vibrate. Slowly the train crawled into the 110th Street station.

Upon gaining the street, he set off at a half run. By his watch it was twenty-five minutes to ten.

As he rounded the corner of 113th Street and sighted Constable's house, he saw the door open and Constable appear. He carried a briefcase. A taxi drew away from the kerb and cruised in the direction of the man standing in the doorway signalling.

For a moment Hero's limbs refused to function, and the scene became fixed. A laundry van was parked across the street, a delivery boy was bicycling past, a postman was delving into his bag. In that moment,

Hero knew that these men must be watchdogs of the F.B.I. The driver, too, would probably be an agent of Wiener's counter-espionage. If Constable gave the address of the Russian Mission, it would be all over with Operation Foxglove.

"Professor Constable! Professor Constable!" Hero called as he ran down the hill. "Professor Constable! Wait!"

The big man had one foot in the cab. He turned and looked at Hero without recognition. He appeared to be in a daze.

"It's Peter Fairweather. I was delayed in the subway and——"

"Yes, Fairweather. What is it?"

"The message. The message from Mary."

A new light came into Constable's eyes. "You have a message?"

Hero spoke rapidly. "We were going to try this morning, for a contact. I told you that I'd managed to get through——"

"When you didn't turn up I thought it was a hoax." Constable waved the cab off. A spasm of nausea passed over Hero, but he could not tell whether it was from relief or because of the prodigious wallop his tooth had just handed him again.

Constable led the way back into the house and Hero followed him up to his study. The scientist opened a cupboard, deposited the briefcase there and shut it again. He turned to Hero. "Well, how do you want it? Darkness? Music?"

As so often in times of emergency, Hero's brain cleared and, denying the pain that swept through him, assured him that he held nearly all the cards. Constable, desperate to regain contact with his child, would go along with anything. He was no longer the reasoning intellectual. He was the bereaved father Hero had seen kneeling before the cabinet babbling unashamedly.

"Yes, in the dark, I think." He set a chair with its back to the cabinet containing the wax hand and motioned to the couch on the other side of the room. "Perhaps you'd like to sit over there? And I want to be tied."

"What the devil for, man? Don't you think I trust you?"

Hero moved the chair away from the cabinet and said, "If I'm in a trance I won't know what I'm doing. But if I'm confined, whatever happens I'll know I didn't do it."

"Whatever you say." Constable went out of the room. Hero heard him shout upstairs, "Jane, I'm back. I don't want to be disturbed." He returned, carrying a length of clothes-line.

Hero sat in the chair and Constable trussed him up. Then he switched on a small, portable radio and fiddled with the dial. There was a burst of music. "Hmmmmph," he said, "Vivaldi's 'Seasons.' Can you bear it?"

"I like it. Now, the lights."

Constable went to the switch by the door and clicked them off. With the door shut, the blinds down and curtains drawn, it was pitch dark. Hero heard Constable feel his way back to the couch and settle there. He said to him, "I'm ready to begin. I shall concentrate for contact with Ruth, for that was how Mary came last night. Don't be impatient. It takes a while."

The silence remained unbroken through the first two, elegant movements of the Vivaldi. Then it was broken by a series of sharp raps and taps that appeared to emanate first from one side of the room and then the other, accompanied by a curiously high-pitched moan. From the vicinity of the man tied to the chair came heavy breathing, groans and unintelligible mutterings, later identifiable as the name "Ruth" repeated again and again. Then a period of silence. As the third movement of the concerto came to an end, there was heard in a penetrating voice, twice repeated, the name "Peter."

Now the man in the chair began to cry out, "Ruth! Ruth! Are you there? Ruth, believe me, I never sent you away." Then puzzlement came into the voice. "Mary? No, no, Ruth! Is that you again, Mary? Where is Ruth?"

He was speaking almost continuously, pausing only as though to listen to the replies to his questions. "Yes, I know you, Mary. I know who you are. Are you always with Ruth now? Is that why you come when I ask for her? Oh, you want to see your father. He's here with me now. He loves you dearly, Mary. He was sad when you said you couldn't come any more. What's that? They told a fib? Yes, but who are They? They were the wrong ones, you say? The others are good? Will They let you come to your father?"

A cry pierced the darkness, from the other side of the room. "Mary!"

The voice of Fairweather rose again. "What's that? Wait, wait, I can't hear, your voice is fainter—— Will you leave a message for your father, Mary? You've left it? Where is it? You say we'll find it? Mary, where are you?"

Silence again. The music came to an end. The announcer introduced Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. Before it began, the whisper was heard again, "Peter! Dear Peter!" Then, with the first bars of the concerto, Fairweather began to plunge and toss, crying out and groaning. Finally the words "Help" and "Lights" emerged.

Constable leapt up from the couch and switched on the lights. Fairweather was half unconscious against his bonds, his head rolling, the whites of his eyes showing. The scientist took a bottle of whisky from a cabinet, and forced some into Fairweather.

Gasping, Fairweather ceased to struggle and his eyes focused. For a moment he looked at Constable as though he had never seen him before. Then he let recognition dawn in his eyes. He murmured, "Professor Constable, are you all right? Did anything happen? I thought Ruth Your daughter Mary"

Constable freed Fairweather. He said, "Man, you've got the power! Mary was here, I heard her voice."

Hero had been almost sure that in the welter of questions and answers Constable would imagine he had heard his daughter's voice. Constable was regarding him with awe. He said, "She was to leave me a message. What was it? Do you know?"

Hero shook his head. "I don't remember"

Constable persisted, "She said we'd find it—it must be in this room."

Hero went through the motions of searching, until a hoarse cry from Constable told him that the discovery had been made.

"Great God, Fairweather, look here!" He was standing over the cabinet that housed the wax hand. "There! The hand!"

It had been moved. Originally it had been posed on its back, the palm upturned, and had lain from left to right. Now it had been turned from right to left, with the palm downward.

With trembling hands, Constable produced the key to the case and inserted it. There was a click. The case had been locked.

Hero stared at the hand. He said, "It's been moved."

The scientist was jubilant. "Here's the proof!" he cried. "But what does it mean?"

"I don't know," Hero said. "It was the other way round when we came in, wasn't it? No one is allowed to touch it?"

"No, no. I swear no one in the house has moved it."

"It's a reversal, isn't it?" Hero said. "A complete turn around. I don't understand it, but if you"

"I do! I think I do! Man, what you've done for me!" Constable suddenly laid his hand on Hero's arm and his eyes were as pleading as those of a dog. "Can you bring her back to me again?"

Hero shook his head as though to get rid of dizziness. He said, "May I call you later in the day, when I've had some rest?"

Constable said, "I'll be here." And then he added, "I'm very shaken and very happy."

Twenty minutes later, Hero was ensconced in the dental chair of Dr. Felix Hofstetter.

Chapter 12

HERO HAD been lucky. Hofstetter had had a cancellation just when he called. The dentist was able to see him immediately. His dream became a reality. The stab of the Novocaine needle was followed by blessed surcease from pain.

It was obvious to Hero that Dr. Hofstetter was a first-class dental surgeon, quick, sure and practised in his movements. But he soon discovered to his dismay that the dentist worked to his own musical accompaniment. Inserting the little mirror, he trilled "Wha-at have we here?" with half a dozen variations, until he picked up the melodic reply, "A very nasty too-hooth." He rendered an aria on "We shall have to do a little dri-hilling."

In self-defence Hero expressed an interest in Hofstetter's procedure in the hope of getting spoken replies—anything but the maddening carolling. This brought on a dissertation on the need for taking a far more accurate impression of the damaged tooth than could be made by dental wax, and a remarkable new compound that made this possible.

The dentist took from a cabinet a container with a fine nozzle, in

which was a liquid under pressure. He told Hero the trade name, "Instantoplast," as he pulled on a pair of thin rubber gloves. He accompanied the operation with a recitative: "First, we prepare the surface—now the Instantoplast." Hero heard the slight hissing of the spray. "In she goes—out she comes. Just like magic." He went soaring away on the last phrase. "Just like ma-hagic."

It was, too. In an instant he had removed the moulds and held them in his fingers. He put something resembling a watchmaker's instrument into his eye and examined the surface of the moulds, exploring them with a pointed steel tool. Hero asked, "Why do you have to wear rubber gloves?"

Hofstetter yodelled a reply: so as not to get the stuff on his hand, where it would stick and take the hairs off.

"It gets as hard as rock," Hofstetter explained. "Here, I'll show you," and then proceeded to demonstrate, first greasing the glove. Holding up his right hand away from him he sprayed his index finger with a smooth white coating. He waved his hand in the air for a moment, carefully pulled his hand from the glove, then withdrew the rubber from the white coating and showed Hero a paper-thin, perfectly formed cast of his finger.

"Wonderful stuff," he exclaimed, "you can cut it, drill it"

Hero was now sitting bolt upright in the dentist's chair, watching Hofstetter as he drew lines across the cast finger with his dental tool. There was no crumbling, flaking or pitting.

"Let me see that!" Hero had not realized how sharply he had spoken until he saw the surprise in the mild face of the dentist. "And the glove, please." Dr. Hofstetter passed both to Hero.

Hero tested the finger. Its tensile strength seemed enormous. "May I have your eyepiece?" Dr. Hofstetter relinquished it. Hero put it to his eye and examined the surface of the cast; then took a steel probe from the tray and made several marks on it. His hands trembling slightly, he thrust the hardened cast into the rubber glove and pushed it to the end of the finger. The marks and scratches showed through, as had the lines on Dr. Hofstetter's hand.

Hero said wonderingly, "Liquid latex! One could spray it on." Then he exclaimed, "Good lord! I must go!"

"I'd better put something temporary into that cavity, otherwise when that Novocaine wears off you'll wish you were dead."

Hero let himself be pushed back into the chair. While Hofstetter swiftly and efficiently supplied the temporary filling, Hero went over, step by careful step, the manufacture and materialization of the dead hand of Mary Constable.

Hofstetter sang out, "All done, neat and tidy"

Hero was up out of the chair and headed for the door, when he caught himself, picked up the finger case, the rubber glove and the container of Instantoplast and said, "May I take these? Do forgive me. You don't know what you've done. You just don't know." He fled, leaving Dr. Hofstetter shaking his head.

All the way downtown in the cab he was filled with the excitement of his discovery. He would be able to recreate Mary Constable's hand under seance conditions and this would be a hammer blow to shatter Professor Constable's last illusion. He basked in anticipation of what Wiener would say. He was grinning as the cab drew up before his hotel. A reception was awaiting him.

A policeman was in the lobby with two burly plain-clothes men. At the desk the white-faced manager said, "Mr. Hero! They've been looking for you. You'd better go up to your room right away."

In his room some men were dusting for finger-prints. Wiener came out of the bathroom and said, "Where the hell have you been?"

In bewilderment, Hero replied, "Having a tooth looked after."

"At half past four in the morning?"

"No. I was at the flicks then."

"Why the devil didn't you check in? I got your message this morning, I phoned you but there was no reply from your room. I flew back. There was still no answer from your room at eight. We came over on the double. They said you'd come in round three. Sully here logged your phone call at that time and the operator confirmed that it was made from here. But nobody saw you go out."

Hero said, "What about the lift boy?"

"His day off," Wiener snapped. "He's gone fishing."

"I don't understand all this," Hero said, and he indicated the men in the room.

"Some time after you left, somebody got in with intent to kill."

"What?"

Wiener motioned to an old man who wore a kind of bandolier strap across his shoulder. "Tell him, Joe."

The old man said, "I'm the night watchman. When I came to your door about four twenty-five it clicked shut like someone had gone in. I hadn't seen anyone in the corridor. I figured it might have been maybe someone nipped in quick-like from the service stairs, so I took it my duty to investigate. I opened the door and switched on my flash. Someone came rushing out. He had a gun."

"Did you see him?"

"Just for a second, before he hit me." The old man's hand went to his jaw. "He was sort of heavy set, with a hat pulled down over his eyes. I must have been out for a couple of minutes. When I came to I went to the phone and told the operator. She called the cops."

Hero asked, "Did you get a look at the gun?"

The old man said, "Come to think of it, it was kind of funny. Not like an automatic, or a police thirty-eight."

Hero felt sick. He was seeing Cryder propped up in bed and the girl lying dead too, the blue about their lips. He likewise had been—was still—marked for execution. He said, "He's killed twice already, maybe three times—I'd have been the fourth."

"Who?" Wiener cried. "Killed whom?"

"The girl who played Mary Constable and Ruth Lesley was Tina Cryder. She and her father, Paul Cryder, were killed early this morning. And there might have been a third murder in the neighbourhood. An engraver, possibly an ex-convict."

Wiener said sourly, "You astonish me, my dear Holmes." He nodded to Sullivan who went to the telephone. To Hero he said, "Maybe you'd better sit down. You've had a shock. So have we, for that matter. We'll clear out this mob and perhaps you could begin at the beginning and tell us what all this is about."

Wiener's patronizing manner restored Hero's control and he was almost pleased to have another jolt for him. "We'd better get on up to the Bessmers—if they're still alive. They'd be next."

Wiener said, "The *Bessmers*?"

Sullivan hung up the telephone into which he had been speaking softly. He said, "The police report two bodies found over a magic shop at 43A Cedar Street at five-thirty this morning. Owner and daughter, name of Cryder. The autopsy is on now. Homicide by cyanide poisoning suspected. A similar case reported at seven a.m. Man found dead in a cheap room on Forsythe Street. Name of Polianski, alias William Pole, engraver. His speciality was engraving twenty dollar bills. He did fifteen years at Leavenworth."

Saul Wiener said, "We'd better not waste time. Come on, you can tell me about it in the car."

Hero said, "Can Mr. Sullivan phone back and get them to take the palm prints of the girl?"

"They'll have taken her finger-prints already."

"Yes, I think you'll find that they match up with those on that note of warning I gave you. But it's her palm prints I need."

Wiener said to his assistant, "Do as the man asks, Sully."

Hero had completed his story—all but his discovery of how the hand could be made—when they roared up to the house at 91st Street.

When there was no reply to the bell, Wiener produced skeleton keys and they entered. The house was empty. The bedrooms showed evidence of a panicky departure—pulled-out drawers, open cupboard doors, things spilt or left lying behind. From the top of a bureau Hero picked up a pair of extraordinary looking spectacles equipped with double lenses, one of them tinted. He said, "Mother left her spectacles. She *must* have been in a tizzy." He dropped them into his pocket. "They're something new and very expensive."

Downstairs again, Hero and Wiener inspected the seance room. In the cabinet area, Hero kicked away the rugs, revealing the parquet floor, commenting, "Enter ghosts, but it will have to be worked from below." He pointed up to the acorn-frieze moulding that ran round the wall just below the ceiling.

"It's hard to see," Hero said, "but some of the acorns are just holes. You'll find infra-red lights behind the frieze. When Mother had specs on she could see to get round during the seances."

They went to the basement, which consisted of a dining-room at the front and a passage which led to the kitchen at the back. Behind the

kitchen and opening on to the back yard there was a small utility room with a tall stepladder standing in one corner. Hero moved it to the window, climbed it and pushed upon the ceiling. The trap-door gave, smoothly and noiselessly. There were side flanges which hooked to keep it from closing.

"What about the cook?" Wiener asked.

Hero replied, "The seances never began until after nine. Pratt saw that she was out of the basement by that time."

There were two other doors in the room, one of which was a locked cupboard. Hero opened it with a skeleton key. There were costumes of various kinds, sheets, lengths of cheese cloth, masks, make-up and tubes of phosphorescent paint.

"Ghost Hall," Hero said. He pointed to a sailor suit, "Son lost at sea," and to an army uniform, "Son killed in war. You name it, they had it!" At the bottom of the cupboard was a small, empty wooden box. "Ruth Lesley was a tall girl," Hero said. "She stood on this." He shut the cupboard and opened the other door, which revealed stairs leading to a cellar. He flipped a light switch and went down. There was a large coal-bin beneath the front of the house, a furnace room, two storage rooms and a larder.

"What are you looking for?" Wiener asked.

Hero said, "Another room."

They came to it finally at the back of the house, concealed behind an upturned table with broken chairs piled on top. When they moved these away they found a padlock on the door. They smashed it with an iron coal shovel. Inside, an unshaded light bulb hung on a cord from the ceiling over a work-bench. Shelves held bottles and containers of liquid spray with the labels removed. At one end of the bench was a small electric cooker with one ring on top and an oven inside.

Hero smelled the nozzles of the various bottles, then opened the door of the oven and sniffed there too. He picked up a two-inch roll of adhesive tape. It was not the usual rough, surgical kind but thin with a surface of silk. He rummaged beneath the bench and picked up a shrivelled bit of rubber.

"This morning," he said carelessly, "I found out how to duplicate the hand of Mary Constable."

"The hell you say," Wiener cried. "How? Where?"

"At the dentist's. And this is where they cooked it up."

Wiener lit a cigarette. "O.K., Alex," he said quietly. "We go along with you. This has been a crazy case and maybe it calls for crazy ways. I'm not going to apologize to you again. You know damn well when they first brought you into this thing I was against it and didn't think you knew which way was up." He broke into a boyish grin. "I'm still not convinced, but if you can make that hand, maybe we're in."

After this Hero spoke at considerable length. He made lists of supplies and people he required and sketched diagrams on the backs of envelopes. Then he looked at his watch. It was a quarter to twelve. "We've got nine hours until seance time. It isn't much, but we'll manage. I'll call Constable and Ferguson."

"Even if your stunt comes off, how do I know that Constable won't pull out of Operation Foxglove?"

Hero looked at him. "I just don't know the answer to that one—yet."

Chapter 13

PETER FAIRWEATHER for the last time, Hero hoped, stood outside the seance room. The stage was set and the other actors were already playing their parts. He was awaiting his cue.

The cabinet was ready, the curtains drawn aside to show the table with its usual apparatus, bell, accordion, trumpet, tambourine. But there was now a second table in front of the cabinet, on which stood the equipment for the creation of a spirit hand. It consisted of a small electric plate turned low on which was set a pot of liquid wax, kept at the temperature where it would neither solidify nor be too hot. There was also a pail of cold water and several napkins. On a side table, still in its case, was the spirit hand of Mary Constable, which Constable had been persuaded to bring to the seance.

Constable was in the room, irritable and nervous. The Bessmers' regular clients were absent, since this was a Tuesday night when there was no regular sitting. Dr. Ferguson and Saul Wiener, whom Constable knew as Saul Roth, were there. By the gramophone and light switches was a large man unknown to Professor Constable.

Constable said to Dr. Ferguson, "Why do we have to come here? Fairweather was getting results at my house. What's become of the Bessmers?"

Ferguson, toying with his pince-nez, said, "The Bessmers, my dear Sam, have decamped. I believe just a few steps ahead of the police."

"Why? The woman had the power."

Ferguson said, "Unfortunately they couldn't resist some financial shenanigans. Someone complained. The atmosphere might be better for Fairweather's experiment because of their departure."

Constable half grunted in acknowledgment of this but then reiterated, "Why are we here? We're trespassing."

Ferguson said, "I was able to arrange it. As every member of our Society is aware, if you want results you must defer to the wishes of the mediums. We are holding this seance under test conditions and it was Mr. Fairweather's idea that he make the attempt in exactly the circumstances that produced results for Mrs. Bessmer. The child, you know, is used to coming here."

Constable said impatiently, "Well, what are we waiting for?"

"For Mr. Fairweather to compose himself," Ferguson replied. "This will be an ordeal." Nodding towards Saul Wiener, he continued to Constable, "I believe you have already met Mr. Fairweather's friend, Mr. Saul Roth, who has asked permission to be present at this experiment? Mr. Roth is a semi-sceptic, but I understand he had rather an unusual contact last night."

Mr. Roth said feelingly, "You can say that again."

Ferguson indicated the man standing by the gramophone and said, "Mr. Sullivan is a member of the Society."

Peter Fairweather walked into the room.

He went to the cabinet, inspected the chair, the instruments, and then the apparatus on the second table. Speaking in a voice so low that the audience had to strain forward in order to hear him, he said, "Gentlemen, I am ready to begin. I have promised Professor Constable that I will attempt a physical manifestation of his daughter. But my primary purpose in this seance is to establish contact with my fiancée, Ruth Lesley. The last two times that I tried on my own to make this contact, Mary Constable, or someone very like her materialization at

seances here, was trying to communicate with her father. If this should occur tonight, I have here the same kind of equipment as was used by the Bessmers, which I found in the house. If she leaves behind a duplicate of that hand," and he indicated the glass case, "then we shall know it is she. Now I am ready. Professor Constable, would you tie me, please?"

BOUND hand, foot and neck to his chair in Mother Bessmer's cabinet, Hero felt nervous qualms. He was about to present a sleight-of-hand show for the highest stakes. It was a game of winner take all, and it called for all his skill and judgment. He had made his promise to Dr. Frank Ferguson but was going to break it. He could not protect anyone. And his mind turned back to Lindy's restaurant with Wiener sitting opposite him, looking scornfully over the rim of his glass and saying, "How would you like to have to make the decision whether nobody gets the secret—or the Russians get the secret away from us?" He was now having to make that decision. It was a gamble and he was betting on the kind of man he thought Constable really was.

So he had acquiesced to Wiener's demand for the presence of the other men at the house. They were Ferris, the finger-print expert; Wiener's superior, Ned Philbrick of the F.B.I. in Washington; and General Augstadt.

At the moment he was not in a hurry. He planned to let Constable stew in the dark for a bit, while he prepared absurd bangs on the tambourine by which the "spirits" announced their presence; and the illusions he would create with the lazy-tongs thrust out from behind the curtains of the cabinet to float objects about. The gramophone blared forth the first of the series of noise-covering hymns. Dr. Ferguson shouted, "Sing!" and the discordant voices jarred against a chorale.

Hero relaxed against his bonds before the exertion of releasing himself, as his thoughts turned back to the frantic nine hours through which they had just passed: the search for the necessary experts, the trials and errors, then success followed by rehearsals to achieve split-second timing. It seemed very pleasant now just to sit here in the dark doing nothing.

His life, therefore, was saved by an itch. He might have remained tied for another ten minutes before beginning the manifestations, but



he was attacked by an acute tickling between his shoulder blades. He had to free his hands. He tested the tension of the rope at the points where he had applied pressure during the binding and found that they gave easily enough, though he had to work at one knot with his teeth. He slipped first one hand, then the other, then loosened the rope about his feet. This time it was not necessary to memorize how he had been tied in order to be properly bound at the end of the seance.

He took out Mother Bessmer's spectacles. The invisible lights from behind the ceiling frieze had been activated earlier. Hero slipped the

glasses on to his nose and his heart stood still. There was someone else in the cabinet: a man. The intruder was standing just inside the curtains with his back to the room, no more than four feet away.

Although the device, of course, did not show up detail and threw no shadows, Hero could see the shape of the man. He was short, broad-shouldered, thick-set. This was the killer. Somehow he had managed to conceal himself inside the house and, under cover of darkness and the racket in the room, had succeeded in getting into the cabinet.

Frozen with horror, Hero waited for the hand to come up out of his pocket with the gas gun. No one would hear the sneeze of the cyanide pistol. He stifled a cry for help. He could do nothing but sit staring at his executioner.

And then Hero's brain started to tick again. The man's curious stare, his immobility—Hero realized that the intruder was listening, not looking. He was blind, in the sense that he could not see in the dark. Awareness of his advantage restored Hero's courage. He might be able to dodge out of the line of fire.

He tensed his muscles as the man's right hand slowly came up out of his pocket. There was no gun in it. Hero saw him open his fingers. Something appeared to be in the palm of his hand, a cork which he now pulled away, and the soft, shadowless light for an instant touched on something that looked like a ring and a needle.

In a flash of intuition Hero knew that this was the very weapon which had been supplied to Tina Cryder, who, as Ruth Lesley, would have put her arms about his neck and killed him.

The man's head turned from side to side. He was not sure of Hero's location within the cabinet. He only knew that his victim was helpless, tied hand and foot to the chair. At the first sound that gave away Hero's position he would hurl himself upon him.

Obligingly Hero scraped his chair. The moon face turned towards him; then, with both arms outstretched, like a great bear, the assailant swept forward as Hero leapt from the chair, only to catch his foot in the rope. The sweeping hand missed him by a hair's-breadth, but as Hero went down the man was on top of him. Hero was able to seize his assailant's right wrist with both hands and cling to it as they grunted and threshed.

THE THREE men outside, with their hands joined, sang: "*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord*"—and heard groans, thumps and heavy gasps, then a jingle, then a rattle of the tambourine and a great sigh-like squawk from the accordion.

HERO HAD managed to clamp a body scissors on the Russian while keeping a grip on the man's right wrist. He kept scissoring the man with his legs, squeezing the breath out of him. Suddenly, he felt him weakening.

Why, Hero thought in surprise, he's flabby! Of course, he's only an executioner. He uses a gas gun and a poison needle—and even as he was thinking these thoughts he was bending the wrist and the hand inward and downward, until with a sudden thrust he jammed the palm with the needle against the thick neck. The man gave a great sigh, his body twitched twice, shuddered and went limp.

Hero trod on something and saw it was the cork that had been removed from the needle. He replaced it over the sharp point, then he heaved the body on to the chair, trussed it up, then hauled the chair to the back of the cabinet. He rattled the tambourine—the signal to Sullivan to turn off the music. The man did so. Hero picked up the lazy-tongs holding a damp rag and thrust it out from the curtains of the cabinet, passing it over Wiener's brow, causing him to cry out, "Son of a gun!" And after that the seance went on as per schedule.

Chapter 14

"LIGHTS!" The call rang out from within the cabinet. Sullivan threw the switch. The bright illumination revealed Augstadt, Philbrick, and Ferris, who had been introduced into the room under cover of darkness. Constable looked at them with surprise, Ferguson with dismay. But their attention returned to the cabinet as Peter Fairweather emerged from between the curtains, closing them behind him. Wiener noticed that he had a scratch on his chin and a discoloration under one eye.

Fairweather stepped to the table before the cabinet on which was the electric plate with the pot of melted wax on it and the pail of cold

water. Between them were two objects, each covered with a white cloth. He twitched the covering off one of these. Constable rose and stared down at it. It was a wax hand, fingers outstretched in supplication, slightly curled, the fine lines visible on the palm, and on the tips of the fingers the ridges and whorls of finger-prints.

"By God!" Constable croaked hoarsely. "By God!"

He took up the wax glove on which there were still a few drops from the cold water in which it had been immersed, and inspected it carefully from every angle. Then, going over to the case where the other hand rested upon its velvet base, he took it out, produced a small magnifying glass and examined the finger-prints. Replacing the first hand on its base and holding the new one, his face aglow, he returned to the table. He took Fairweather's hand in a crushing grip and pumped it. He said, "Fairweather! You've done it! She's been here. It's the hand of my daughter."

"No one has been here," Fairweather said quietly. Every word was like the tick of a time bomb. Ferguson turned pale.

Constable looked up sharply. "Eh? What's that you said?"

"This is not the hand of Mary Constable."

Constable flushed. "What the devil's got into you, Fairweather?"

Peter Fairweather, in the last speech he would ever make in that name, said, "I made it myself. Will you take your seat, Professor Constable? I have something to tell you."

Constable slumped back into his seat, the wax hand in his lap.

"My name," Hero began, "is not Peter Fairweather. My real name is Alexander Hero and I am connected with the British Society for Psychical Research. My profession is investigator of so-called occult and psychic phenomena. In producing what you believe to be the hand of Mary Constable this evening, I have perpetrated a hoax. That hand is not genuine, nor is the other, which is the product of a cruel and vicious swindle which has been worked upon you these past months."

"Have you gone out of your mind?" Dr. Ferguson was standing, white with anger, and shaking his pince-nez at Hero. "What do you think you're doing? Why have you summoned these others here, without consulting me? You gave me your word that you would protect Constable."

Hero replied coldly, "I made it a condition that you would leave the matter in my hands, no matter who might be hurt, including Professor Constable. Do you remember?"

Ferguson said, "I trusted you not to destroy my friend."

There was too much at stake to consider one man's pain. Hero said, "Dr. Ferguson, you brought me over here to help you solve a problem —how the hand of Mary Constable was made and to duplicate it if I could. I have done so. But you cannot control my opinions nor my course of action. My opinion is that you, Dr. Ferguson, have been coddling Professor Constable to the danger and detriment of your country, and mine too. And you gentlemen," his glance took in the others there, "have done the same. You didn't have the courage to face up to Professor Constable and compel him to play the game. You were afraid that if you did he would run out on you. He has been acting like a spoiled child and you have let him get away with it."

Professor Constable looked up from the wax glove with an expression of incredulity on his face. "I, a spoiled child?" he asked.

"He's right!" General Augstadt exploded.

"Football player," Constable said scornfully to the burly General. "And as for you," he turned to Hero, "you've got the power. I'm not interested in your opinions. I have heard my daughter's voice speaking to me and felt her touch and I have seen her. Twice she has left me her hand as proof. Only this morning, at home, I heard her voice."

"You did not," Hero said.

"Are you saying that I'm a liar?"

"You only thought you heard her. I asked all the questions and repeated her answers. Your imagination supplied her voice."

"You're wrong! What about the hand that was turned? You were bound, and the case was locked."

"Every medium is adept at getting out of rope ties," Hero replied. "It's part of my job to be able to do the things that they do. As for the case, anything that locks can be unlocked. Under cover of the Vivaldi, I opened the case with a skeleton key, shifted the hand, locked the case, returned to my chair and replaced the ropes."

Constable's massive head jerked from the violence of his emotions. "What about the child you yourself saw here last week?"

"She was played by a magician's assistant called Tina Cryder, introduced through a trap-door. She was a tiny girl, able to confine herself in small spaces. She was also a talented mimic."

"Produce her!" Constable commanded.

"I can't," Hero said, "she's dead."

A roar of harsh laughter burst from Constable's throat. Eventually it died away and Hero broke the shocked silence that followed.

"But she has left us her palm print " he said.

Constable asked, "A palm print? What's that got to do with it?"

Hero indicated the hand in the glass case. "You will find the palm print of Tina Cryder on that hand." Then, turning to Ferris, "Bill, will you show Professor Constable?"

Ferris produced some photographic enlargements of the lines of a small palm. He said, "If you will come over here, Professor" He went to the case and Constable followed. "I think you can compare them even without a glass," Ferris said. "The lines of the two palms are identical. See here, this clear crossing which makes a W. Here, the three X's in a row. And here, the short, broken life-line." The young man suddenly realized what he had said and looked startled.

"But the finger-prints are my daughter's!" Constable cried.

"They are," Hero interposed. "The palm prints are Tina Cryder's and the finger-prints Mary Constable's. This is a characteristic case of misdirection of attention in stage magic. Once the finger-print identity had been established, no one thought to question further."

A new light glared in Constable's eyes. "Impossible!" he bellowed. "No human hand, living or dead, could have been withdrawn from that cast through that fine wrist opening without breaking the wax. What have you got to say about that?"

"No human hand was," Hero said.

Constable pushed the second hand under Hero's nose. "Palm prints, palm prints!" he shouted. "And whose palm prints might these be? Who came here tonight?"

Hero said, "If you will examine them you will see that they are different from those of the other hand. They belong to Ellen Wiener, the daughter of Mr. Saul Wiener, whom you know as Saul Roth. Mr. Wiener is the New York regional director of the Federal Bureau

of Investigation, charged with security and counter-espionage. His daughter is about ten years old."

Professor Constable glared from side to side and Hero was reminded of a bull in a *corrida* before the last desperate charge. "But your fiancée! When you first went into the cabinet you said——"

Hero said, "Ruth Lesley was a pure invention, to test the Bessmers. When I went into that cabinet they produced, as a materialization of Ruth, Tina Cryder, the girl who played your daughter."

Professor Constable emitted a bellow of rage. "You lying scoundrels, what are you trying to do to me? I'll kill you for this."

The others in the room shifted uncomfortably but Hero remained unmoved. He said quietly, "We are trying to show you a most dangerous and deadly conspiracy. When I have finished, I will ask only one thing of you. I will put into your hands a transcript of the messages purporting to have been delivered to you by your daughter. They are in sequence from the very beginning, recorded by Mr. Woodmanston. I ask you to read them and judge for yourself."

And even as he spoke the lightning intelligence of Constable was already at work reading them from memory, and as quickly the hurt in him and the loss of his child were reacting defensively.

"But the finger-prints," he protested. "They are my daughter's. You have admitted it. It can't be done mechanically."

"It can be done. I can offer scientific proof."

The words "scientific proof" triggered all of Constable's work mechanisms. For all his creative life the scientist had been engaged in supplying proof of the seemingly impossible. He was unable to resist another demonstration. He sat down, his aggressive chin thrust out.

Hero said, "The hand which was produced here tonight was produced under conditions identical with the one turned out at the Bessmers' seance; in complete darkness, with distracting sound effects. I will now reproduce yet another hand of Mary Constable, with her finger-prints, in full illumination."

Nobody stirred.

Hero disappeared into the cabinet and returned bearing a tray which had been handed up to him through the trap-door. On it was a silver coffee-pot filled with water, two pressure spray containers, a roll of

adhesive tape, the cast of the hand of a young girl, rubber gloves and a number of photographic enlargements of finger-prints.

Hero nodded to Sullivan, who left the room and returned with three men, one of whom looked like a workman in his Sunday clothes.

Hero began, "Professor Constable is right; it is impossible for a human hand to be withdrawn from a thin, wax glove without breaking it. He is also right to doubt that the finger-prints of the dead can be reactivated. Yet it seems to me that he should have asked why the souls or spirits of the dead, if such there be, should retain finger-prints at all."

He picked up one of the spray containers and held it out for them all to see. "This," he said, "is a new dental compound, a plastic spray for making casts, called Instantoplast. It hardens instantly and can be cut, drilled or engraved." He indicated the second atomizer and said. "This contains liquid latex under pressure and is used for waterproofing.

"The first hand was that of the girl Tina Cryder. She was employed by the Bessmers to play various parts in their seances. Her finger-tips were covered with this fine, adhesive tape and the rest of her hand and wrist oiled. The hand was then sprayed with Instantoplast.

"The problem of getting her hand out of the cast was solved very simply," Hero continued. "They cut round it on a median line, separating the two halves. The girl then withdrew her hand. The halves were fitted together again and the seams sprayed.

"We now have a thin, hollow, porcelain-hard, transparent cast of a hand, through which the lines of the palm prints can be seen, but the finger-tips are blank, because of the tape. An ex-convict engraver named Poliansky now went to work."

Constable said, "I suppose you can't produce him either?"

"You are right," Hero agreed quietly. "He is also dead."

This time Professor Constable did not laugh.

"The engraver traced the palm lines through the transparency to the outside of the cast. Then, from photographs of Mary Constable's finger-prints, he reproduced them on the cast."

"Not possible!" cried Constable. "How would they have got her finger-prints? The child was cremated!"

Hero said, "Have you forgotten that your entire family was finger-printed as a precautionary measure?"

"Of course not, but the prints were kept in F.B.I. files."

"And also in the files of the New York Police Department. In an organization of some twenty thousand men, it is a reasonable assumption that someone, for a price, may have extracted the prints from the files long enough for them to be photographed."

Professor Constable appeared to accept this.

"For the next step," Hero continued, "this cast was sprayed with two coatings of liquid latex, and dried in a small electric oven. The latex was then stripped from the cast inside out, with the lines and whorls of the prints now on the outside of a perfect rubber glove."

Hero held up a tin of the liquid latex and a thin glove, and resumed: "They were now ready for the final step. A small, cylindrical wooden block, with a plug at one end, was carved to fit into the wrist. The glove was then filled with lukewarm water, the plug closed and a thin film of grease applied to the glove. The prepared article was handed up to Mother Bessmer through a trap-door by means of which her materializations also made their entrances and exits. Under cover of darkness she dipped the rubber glove, slightly expanded with water, into the wax until a transparent skin had formed over it."

Hero looked directly at Constable. "You are probably not aware of it, sir, but this room is bugged with infra-red light and Mother Bessmer wore spectacles with special lenses which enabled her to see and move about freely." He reached into his breast pocket and produced them, then resumed. "When the coating was formed, she withdrew the hand from the bowl of wax and plunged it into the cold water, at the same time removing the plug at the end of the wrist and letting out the water, which collapsed the rubber glove inside the cooling wax cast. The cast was still sufficiently malleable for her to shape the curve of the fingers and give them a life-like appearance. It was then put back into the cold water until it had hardened completely, after which she could withdraw the empty rubber glove through the narrow wrist opening without injuring the hand. The glove was concealed about her person and she returned to the cabinet. The lights went up and on the table was the spirit hand of Mary Constable, finger-prints and all—that one there," and Hero looked towards the white hand on its black velvet cushion in the glass case.

The expression on Constable's face was one of pathetic bewilderment struggling with disbelief.

General Augstadt muttered, "T.D." It was the highest accolade that the General could bestow. T.D. stood for "Touch-down."

Hero picked up the white cast from the tray in one hand and the rubber glove in the other. "This is the cast we have made as I described, and this is the glove we have taken from it."

He introduced the three men standing at the side of the room. The youngest man was an engraver, die-maker and precision cutter of hard steel surfaces, who was working for the Acme Precision Tool Company of West Newark, New Jersey. He testified that he had worked upon the cast, cutting it so that the human hand could be removed, then rejoining it and eliminating the seam.

The elderly man was an expert technician and engraver working for the Federal Bureau of Engraving in Washington. He testified that he had, from photographs of finger-prints with which Hero supplied him, engraved an exact duplicate of the prints, except reversed, on to the same cast.

The workman, uneasy in his Sunday clothes, was a foreman in the Rubber Accessories plant of the Goodyear Rubber Company at Akron, Ohio. He testified that the rubber glove which Hero held up was made under his supervision from the same cast also that afternoon.

"Thank you," said Hero.

Sullivan led the three witnesses from the room.

"And now, gentlemen" Picking up the silver coffee-pot he poured water into the wrist of the glove and then plugged it with a stopper. The hand, expanded by the liquid, took on a horribly life-like quality. Professor Constable stared transfixed; Ferguson turned his head away. Hero donned a second glove himself, and plunged the hand into the bowl of hot wax. Then, following in every detail his explanation, he produced the third hand of Mary Constable and laid it dripping and shining on the table.

"Mountebank!" Professor Constable exploded out of his chair and across the room to the table. With a great crash he brought his fist down, shattering the wax hand. "Charlatan! Liar! The child is dead. She's not here to throw your lies and tricks into your teeth."

All the others were on their feet as the tortured man turned upon them with maniacal fury. "Damn you all!" he shouted.

Hero said quietly, "There is something else I would like you to see, Professor Constable."

He removed the cloth from the second object on the table and revealed a new wax cast, this time of a powerful, masculine hand.

Constable stared. "Whose is that?"

"The palm prints are Sullivan's," said Hero, "but the finger-prints, Professor Constable, are yours. Will you compare them?"

The fire in the scientist flared up, then flickered out. He put down the cast he had been holding, picked up the man's hand and stood looking at it in bewilderment. He turned it so that the finger-prints were visible and held it beside his own, silently comparing them.

An exultant chuckle broke from General Augstadt. "I always said it was a lot of nonsense, all that junk about spirits and the hereafter. When you're dead, you're dead, and you've proved it."

Hero looked up. "I have done nothing of the sort," he said sharply.

"But you've just shown" cried Augstadt.

"I have proved that the Bessmers were tricksters and fakers. And I have shown you how they made the hand. But I will ask you, General Augstadt, and any others here who may be so minded, not to ascribe to me things that I have never said."

Samuel Constable had stopped examining the hand and was now regarding Hero, a curious expression upon his face.

"Up to now," Hero said, "I believe there has not been one iota of convincing proof offered that there is life beyond the grave. But may I remind you that no evidence has ever been presented that there is not. Whether the spirit survives is a matter for the future. Until such proof is obtained, it's a matter of the faith of the individual."

Professor Constable asked, "Is this your opinion, young man?"

"Yes," replied Hero. And then he added, "But of one thing I think we may be certain. If a breakthrough is ever attained it will not be by such methods as have been attempted at seances like the Bessmers'. It will be something perhaps not yet even dreamed of by man, who has only begun to reach behind the stars. Who knows, it might in the end be a scientist who achieves it."

Professor Constable nodded in thoughtful agreement. He said, "I accept the evidence of this hand, with my finger-prints," and set it down upon the table. Then, turning to the others, he said with grave dignity, "I will see you in the morning at the laboratory, gentlemen." As he walked out of the room he passed by, but did not so much as glance at the hand of Mary Constable in its glass case.

"You shaved that one close!" breathed Saul Wiener. "As you realize, you nearly didn't get away with it!"

"He's a scientist," Hero said. "I could count on his worshipping the Great God Q.E.D."

Relief had brought colour back into the countenance of Dr. Ferguson. He came over to Hero, and picked up one after the other the articles on the tray. He murmured, "I knew that my confidence would not be misplaced. I suppose you want to hurry back to London to your own work now. If you have a moment before you leave, do call me. Perhaps we might be able to have lunch together." He left the room.

Wiener felt impelled to challenge Hero once more. He said, "Why did Constable reject the evidence of the copy of his daughter's hand that you made, and accept that of his own?"

"Because," Hero replied, "of his resistance to the idea of losing his child again. However," and his pause made them all turn and look at him, "if it hadn't worked, I had another piece of evidence. If you will come with me, I'll show you."

Hero drew open the curtains of the cabinet. The Russian's head had fallen back. He was indubitably dead.

Saul Wiener and General Augstadt both said, "God." Philbrick said nothing until after a cursory examination of the man, when he asked, "Who the devil is he? How did he get here?"

"I think you will find," Hero said, "that this is the fellow who killed the Cryders and Polianski, and who twice tried to kill me, the first time in my hotel room, and the second time tonight, in the cabinet. The Bessmers had some way of getting their assistants in and out of this house which we still have not found. I don't doubt that you will. The man knew it, of course. He was the executioner. Fortunately, I had slipped my ties before he came in, otherwise you would now be looking at me propped up there."

Wiener stared at Hero and said, "What happened?"

Hero replied, "I'm afraid I killed him."

Philbrick finally spoke. He said, "How?"

Hero spread out the fingers of the limp right hand and showed the ring, the needle and the cork. He said, "You'll probably want that looked at in the lab." He turned to Wiener. "My guess is that this piece of equipment was supplied to Tina Cryder, who was ordered to use it on me the next time I came to meet Ruth Lesley. She wrote me a warning."

General Augstadt said, "I still think we should have grabbed the Bessmers while we had the chance. Now they've blown."

"They were scared of the Russians," Hero said. "They'd been stupid and greedy when they allowed a stranger into the seance. That's what started to let the water out of the bathtub—putting Tina Cryder up to playing Ruth Lesley. They probably knew that the Russians had found out. But they're bound to surface somewhere," he added. "They asked me about going to England."

Wiener said, "But in the meantime we've let the big ones get away—the ones who hired them and sent *him*"—and he nodded towards the dead man.

Hero asked, "What good would they do you? By tomorrow they'll know that you got Constable out of their trap and will be on their way home. Incidentally, when they get there, they'll probably be in even more hot water than if you laid them by the heels."

Philbrick, contemplating the corpse, had the last word. "I don't suppose we'll ever figure out the British," he said. "But it's just as well we're on the same side."

THE WIND was from the west and after take-off the B.O.A.C. aircraft flew towards Manhattan to gain altitude before circling and heading out over the Atlantic. Hero looked down once more upon the city. In one of those crowded together, downtown buildings, the body of a girl lay on a marble slab; a sheet draped over the exquisite figure, the blue fire of her eyes extinguished for ever. It was thus that he had seen her for the last time, when he had accompanied Wiener to the morgue to confirm the identification. She had been venal, greedy and treacherous.

She had sold out her country. But she had been a warm, vibrant human being, too. And in the end, it seemed certain, by sparing his life she had paid with her own.

Manhattan was now spread out below. He was able to pick out the campus of Columbia University.

Was Constable working down there, angry at having been taken in, or horrified by the narrowness of his escape? Probably not. A man with Constable's overweening ego did not waste time reflecting upon his own shortcomings.

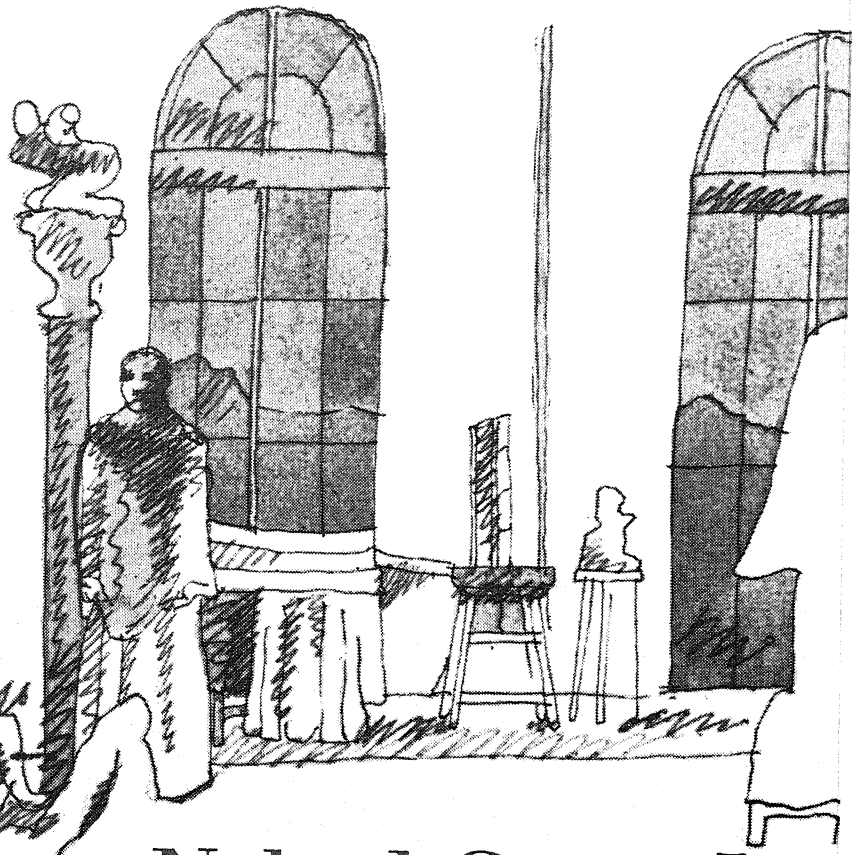
Just before his departure Hero had had a farewell luncheon with Dr. Ferguson. They had discussed Egypt, atonal music, the proper way to jug a hare, the stock market, the psychology of Orientals—everything but the hand of Mary Constable. At the end of the meal, Dr. Ferguson had murmured vaguely, "So very good of you to have come over to help us out. I hope you will find this adequate." "This" had been an envelope containing a very generous cheque.

The jet-liner approached its cruising altitude. The whole of five boroughs of New York had become a panorama. Were the Bessmers somewhere down there hiding, in fear of their lives, or were they lying murdered in some sleazy rooming-house? Or had they fled the country?

He despised them for what they were, and he hated them for having led him to yet another disappointment in his long quest for some proof of a hereafter. Each new case seemed in some way to offer hope, each one ended in disillusionment and tragedy, the mystery of the unknown still unpierced.

Yet Hero knew that he was not giving up. If there was no limit to human corruption, chicanery and greed, neither was there any boundary to that endless space which man had named the universe. Poised now between earth and sky, he was more than ever convinced of the insignificance of man in the face of the unknown. Millions of sincere people believed in and searched for a hereafter. One would have to keep on trying.





Naked Came I

A novel of RODIN

A CONDENSATION OF THE BOOK BY

David Weiss

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MILTON GLASER

"Naked Came I" is published by Heinemann, London

He was a backward, near-sighted boy, born in a Paris slum, but he had one compelling passion—to create with his hands, to become a sculptor—and during Auguste Rodin's stormy life this passion was to override all else. Because of it he suffered—and caused suffering, especially to two women who loved him deeply.

Rodin was the most controversial artist of an age when controversy over a work of art could cause a national crisis. Like his great predecessor, Michelangelo, he dared to model the human form in the starkness of its natural beauty, and for this he was reviled by press and public.

The story of this difficult, single-minded genius —one of the greatest sculptors the world has ever known—is admirably told against the background of Paris in the later 19th century. Rich in historic events and studded with famous names, *Naked Came I* is a book in every way as exciting as its subject, and will make a profound impression on all who read it.

"Rodin . . . bestrides this novel like a colossus, like one of his own gigantic figures."
—*Irish Times*

"A fascinating novel." —*The Evening News*

Naked came I into the world,

and naked must I go out.

—*Don Quixote*, by Cervantes

Part I – The Family

THE FATHER of the infant was a French peasant from Normandy. Jean Baptiste Rodin had not expected to be the father of a son at the age of thirty-eight, and he was overjoyed. He had two daughters, Clotilde and Marie, but they did not really count. He had come to Paris from Normandy, knowing that he could never get rich enough to own land there. A son was the next best thing. A son would provide for his old age, carry on his name. Rodin meant red in Normandy, and the boy, like nearly all his family, had red hair.

He had to register his son in the *Mairie* of his *arrondissement*, but neither he nor his wife, Marie, a peasant from Lorraine, could write, and he asked his wife's sister, Aunt Thérèse, to fill in the form. She was housekeeper, model and mistress to the painter Drolling, and had learned to write from him.

Papa said, "We will call him François Auguste."

Aunt Thérèse wrote: "François Auguste Rodin, born November 12, 1840, at 3 rue de l'Arbalète, Paris."

Papa said, "I will put away a louis to celebrate and for a Mass."

"He looks like a healthy one," said Aunt Thérèse.

"All Rodins are healthy," Papa said vigorously. But his thick, heavy features took on a troubled air. He pushed his stubby hand through his hair and scratched his Louis-Philippe chin whiskers. He was a supporter of the monarchy, of the Bourbons. But King Louis-Philippe was no guarantee for the future of his son. This was the Paris of the middle class, of big business. And he was a peasant, although he had risen to be a minor police official.

The quarter in which he lived, *mon Dieu*, it was hardly better than a slum, and infested with prostitutes. But he could not afford anything better than this medieval labyrinth of cobbled streets. The rue de l'Arbalète was within walking distance of the Sorbonne and Notre Dame, and the district was dominated by the grey cupolas of the Panthéon and by many fine old churches—St. Séverin, Ste. Geneviève, and Val de Grâce. The Rodins rented the fifth floor of a crumbling stone-and-plaster house, and had to climb 101 steps to reach it.

Aunt Thérèse said, "I like the name Auguste, I named my first-born that."

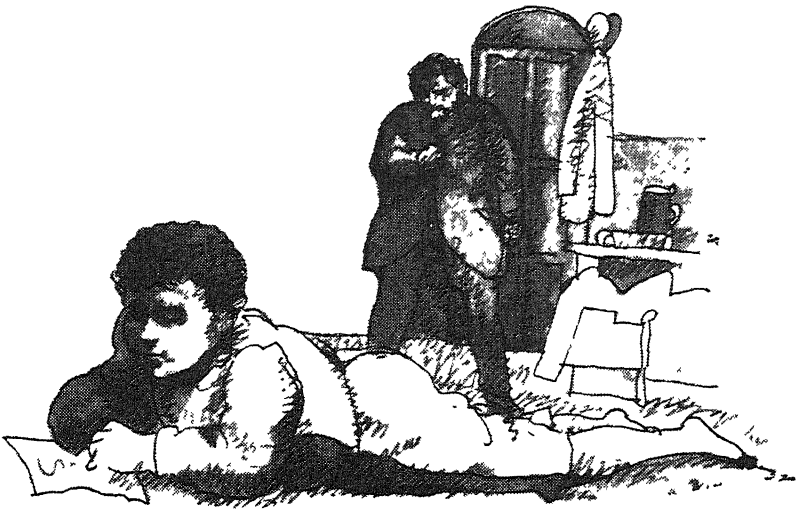
She gave Papa Rodin a kiss of congratulation.

How pitiful, thought Papa. He liked Aunt Thérèse, as everyone did; she was pretty, cheerful, spirited. But what would become of her three illegitimate boys? She was not even ashamed.

He prayed that François Auguste would grow up to be pious, strong, and a minor police official. Only the *bourgeois* were major police officials; they could read and write. Why couldn't his son learn to write? His own inability to do so was why he was still a police messenger at only 800 francs a year. He would give François Auguste a good education.

WHEN AUGUSTE was five—the François was never used—and preparing to enter the near-by Jesuit school, Aunt Thérèse gave him drawing crayons as a present. She had borrowed them from Drolling without asking.

The Rodins lived in a cleaner street now. The house was better too, and they had the first floor. This afternoon he was alone with Aunt Thérèse, who had promised to watch him. A red-haired, stocky, shy, near-sighted boy, he was fascinated by the black crayons. They made such distinct lines—he could really see them! He wanted to draw Aunt Thérèse's delicate features, but he should draw Papa first—Papa came first in everything. He found some brown paper which had been wrapped round the potatoes Mama had bought for their dinner. Perching cross-legged at the kitchen table, he drew, frowning, preoccupied. The crayon made a thick line like Papa's lips, a scowl. He drew the body, Papa's dumpy trousers, rumpled coat, thick belt.



Aunt Thérèse said, "That's nice. I'll get you colours next time."

The next week, when Mama bought cabbage, he took the wrapping paper and drew on it. The fish was wrapped in newspapers, and he copied pictures from them. The greatest delight was when Mama bought butter, cheese and eggs; they were wrapped in white paper which was wonderful to draw on.

He drew Papa looking excited; Mama, patient and subdued; Aunt Thérèse, gay; his sister Marie, who was sweet; his half sister Clotilde, who was pretty. He drew only when he was alone, afraid that Papa would not approve.

He heard Mama: "Auguste, where is the wrapping paper? We've nothing to light the fire."

After that she hid the paper.

One day Mama came in with her shopping basket and took the white cheese from the white wrapping paper. Busy with the other groceries, she did not see the paper fall to the floor. As she turned her back Auguste took a crayon and flung himself on the floor. He pressed his left hand on the paper and outlined his fingers; then staring at the lines in his hand, he began to fill in the hand on the paper. The door slammed and there stood Papa.

"Auguste, get up from the floor!" Papa crumpled the wrapping paper and threw it towards the stove. He pulled off his shoes, sighed and sat down at the table.

Auguste smoothed out the paper and started to draw one of the shoes. Papa was eating, and didn't notice until Auguste jostled a table leg, spilling Papa's soup. "Give me that paper!"

Auguste had never disobeyed Papa before, but he shook his head.

"Mama, get me the strap." Mama unhappily handed him the strap. He said to Auguste, "Put the paper in the fire!"

Auguste thrust the drawings into the fire, feeling stricken.

"And the crayons. Quickly!"

"Please, Papa?"

"Now!"

The crayons went into the fire also.

"Auguste, go to bed!"

"Without supper?" Mama said. "Jean, he will get sick."

"Put him to bed." To the pale frightened boy he shouted, "You will not waste wrapping paper! If I find any drawings round the house I will spank you to within an inch of your life. I must put you in school before you become an idiot."

Auguste went to bed. Later Mama gave him a bowl of soup, but he couldn't eat or sleep.

And when Papa wasn't home, the child took pieces of charcoal intended for the stove and sketched on the alley walls outside.

THE JESUIT school was on the corner of the boulevard St. Michel. Auguste hurried towards it eagerly the first day, but he was taken aback by the grey, forbidding façade of the ancient building, and by the sternness of the middle-aged priest-teachers. It was a poor man's school, dedicated to turning out boys who would be devout, work hard and be content with their place.

Religious instruction was the heart of the curriculum. Auguste had great difficulty memorizing the catechism. The school also taught arithmetic, which he did not understand; Latin, which he loathed; reading, writing, geography, history and grammar. He did poorly in all subjects because of his near-sightedness. Art was taboo. When Auguste drew a

map of the Holy Roman Empire, a ruler descended harshly on his fingers. He could not hold a pencil for a week. The next time he was caught drawing he was whipped. But he was stubborn. He caricatured the inhumanly stiff faces of his teachers with an unholy joy.

The only other thing that excited Auguste was the revolution of 1848, when King Louis-Philippe was deposed. Suddenly and unexpectedly, there was no school. But the revolution stopped being a picnic, even for the boy, when the workers of Paris took up arms against the provisional government and demanded a republic. The Rodins' *arrondissement* became the centre of the fighting. Rebels erected barricades on the boulevard St. Michel. Discharged workers, guns and spikes in hand, shouted: *La liberté ou la mort!* The Marseillaise was sung by both sides. Papa stopped working, for no one was allowed out. They had to exist on one potato a day through four days of savage fighting.

Papa, whose royalist convictions had been shaken by the slaughter of the workers, was relieved when Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was elected President of France at the end of the year. School resumed, and Auguste's eyes grew worse. He had become, without question, the worst pupil in the school.

The Rodins had moved again, to a better house in the rue St. Jacques: there were two windows in each room, and glass in each window. But people threw refuse into the street, which they then washed down to avoid the plague. There was always a chill in the house and an odour for which there was only one name: poverty. But Papa earned 1,200 francs a year now. Outside the house was a statue of Cupid. The boy started to sketch it but Papa ripped the paper out of his hands and cried, "Auguste, you are impossible! You do so badly at school, I don't know what to do with you."

The nine-year-old boy tried to be obedient, but his drawings were his escape from this world. He began to stay away from school, and one day this was reported to Papa. Auguste had gone to Notre Dame that afternoon—he liked its grandeur: the pinnacles, the light, far-reaching buttresses, and the great west front with its towers. When he came home, he tried to explain this to Papa.

Papa said, "*Voilà!* I have an idiot for a son!" And he thrashed Auguste with his heavy belt.

SCULPTOR OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

AUGUSTE RODIN has been called the Moses of sculpture. He led it out of the nineteenth-century wilderness of pretty marble nymphs, solemn allegorical figures and pompous national heroes into a promised land where ordinary human beings could be made heroic without being idealized by the sculptor's hand. Their heroism lies in the unconquerable human spirit that dignifies the mortal flesh.

Modelling the human body, he sometimes exaggerated things that were judged ugly by the conventions of his time—wrinkled skin, heavy features, contorted muscles. But it is the spirit, the irresistible life-force, that emerges from his vibrant, often anguished figures.

Rodin's technical approach to form derived from the Renaissance and, in some instances, directly from Michelangelo. But the way he handled his surfaces was new. His aim was not only to convey actual

Auguste refused to cry. Mama stood there whimpering, and Papa collapsed into a chair, groaning. He decided to send this numskull to his brother Alexander's school at Beauvais.

Uncle Alexander set out with Norman vigour to educate his nephew. Auguste's prominent nose, his high, broad forehead, his firm mouth indicated sensitiveness, the uncle said. He was sure the Jesuits had failed, not Auguste.

Auguste gained weight, and developed a width of chest and shoulders in the country air. But he learned nothing. After four years Uncle Alexander was forced to admit that the Jesuits were right. "He knows no Latin, his spelling and composition are horrible."

AUGUSTE was fourteen, and Papa announced that he had to go to work. It was a lovely June Sunday, ideal for one of their family picnics, but at Papa's wish they were having dinner at home. "The question is," he said, "what kind of work?"

"I want to draw," said Auguste.

Papa rose to whip him, then decided it was not fitting on a Sunday. Mama tried to keep calm, and Auguste stood there like stone. Papa suddenly noticed that his elder daughter Clotilde was absent. Sunday dinner was the core of his family life, the one time they were all together. He shouted, "Where's Clotilde?"

physical movement, but also, by leaving his bronze surface rough so that it caught the play of light and shade, to heighten the illusion of restless vitality. Marble, on the other hand, he hated to scar, so he made the uninterrupted flow of the material suggest its own movement.

Living flesh was so important to Rodin as a symbol of life that he hated to clothe it. Besides, he feared that changing fashions might give his work a dated look. In his statue of the great Balzac he found a solution by clothing the writer in the dateless Dominican robe he wore when he worked.

But Rodin didn't even need a whole body to project his enormous concern with humanity. He could model just a hand, with tense fingers reaching out into space, and make it a symbol of aspiration, tenderness or wrath. EMILY GENAUER

Mama said, "I don't know where she is."

He exclaimed, "A daughter who is never home, a son who wants to be an artist! Drawing! I have no money for such nonsense. If you could spell, I could get you in the Prefecture of Police, but now . . . ?" He shrugged hopelessly.

Auguste stared at Papa sitting at the head of the dinner table. He had missed his family very much in Beauvais, even Papa, and he considered them now as Papa discussed the trades he might learn. He noticed that Papa's face was prematurely wrinkled; his voice, when angry, was heavy and rough. Mama was blonde with grey eyes and flat features. She was deeply religious, and had a perpetual expression of sadness. His sister, Marie, was slender—too frail, thought Auguste; her reddish-blonde hair and pale face gave her the look of a medieval saint. Her sweet expression was often one of resignation, but when she was happy her small oval face lit up and she was pretty. She wore a black dress with a high white collar—almost like a nun. Clotilde, Papa's daughter by his first wife, was a beauty, vivacious, with a dark complexion, green eyes, and black hair.

Mama and Marie brought in the dinner and Papa grumbled again to Auguste, "Have you no shame over your poor marks?"

"I don't want to be a police official, I want to go to art school."

"To the Beaux Arts no doubt, Monsieur Rodin?"

"No, Papa, not until I get the proper training."

Marie said, "Papa, perhaps he should go to art school."

"No," said Papa. Teeth in a mouthful of veal, he declared, "There are several thousand artists in Paris alone, but do they eat decent meals like this?"

At this moment Clotilde entered, looking especially attractive in a hat with ostrich feathers. "Oh, not for dinner," she said as her mother pulled out her chair. "I am being taken to dinner."

"On Sunday?" Papa was outraged. "Who is the young man? What splendid carriage brought you home? Is it waiting for you on the corner?" Clotilde had become much too pretty; she did not want to be a seamstress, or even a milliner. And she was insolent.

"I just came home to get a wrap," she said.

Papa said, "Sit down. Don't keep Mama waiting."

Gaston was waiting, Clotilde thought. He was wealthy and infatuated with her; he had just told her that beauty such as hers must be framed in gold. But there had been other men who had made promises, most of them unkept, and she wavered, not sure what to do. "What about my friend?" she asked.

"Invite the young man in," said Papa.

But that was impossible, thought Clotilde. Gaston came from a good family—if he set foot in here he would never want to see her again. "I'm sorry, Papa," she said, "but we've made arrangements for dinner."

"Because we're not good enough to meet him," said Papa.

"I didn't say that," said Clotilde.

"It is as obvious as those feathers you are wearing."

"He likes them."

"I don't." Papa reached out to pull them off but she evaded him and ran to fetch her wrap. He shouted, "If you go now, do not come back."

"But why?" She had paused.

"You're too dressed up to be honest. You will end up in the women's prison of Saint Lazare."

Clotilde looked stunned. Papa was really angry.

"That prison is filled with prostitutes who are diseased, mentally ill. I don't want my daughter to end there."

The look of horror in Clotilde's eyes turned to hatred.

Mama said, "Jean, she is young, wilful. But you can't throw her out!"

"She insulted me!" How dare Mama defend her? Everybody was opposing him! He could not back down, he had gone too far.

"If you love her," said Mama, "you will forgive her."

Clotilde started again to get her wrap, and Papa declared, "Don't come back!"

Mama renewed her pleas. Marie joined in, then Auguste, as Clotilde ran towards the door. She paused at the threshold, and in this instant both she and Papa hoped the other would give in, but neither could. She grew pale, and then was gone. Marie and Auguste rushed to the door, and saw her vanish into a carriage at the corner.

Mama cried, "Jean, how could you? You know she has no money."

Papa banged on the table and said he wanted no more talk.

Auguste had remained by the door, and Papa growled, "Auguste, don't be a fool. Eat!"

"I'm not hungry." Would Papa throw him out too?

Papa glared at the boy. It was bad enough about Clotilde—he couldn't lose his only son.

Marie said softly, "I know of a free art school. The Petite École de Dessin."

"What about his room and board here?" asked Papa.

"I can take care of it," said Marie. "Selling religious medals."

"Well, well!" Papa was surprised. This was revolt from a most unexpected quarter.

Marie said, "The Petite École trains draughtsmen, rather than artists. He'd be learning a trade, Papa."

Papa demanded, "How do you know?"

Marie blushed. "I met a young man, Barnouvin, who studies there."

"Why haven't you invited him here?"

"Papa, he's a painter. You said you don't like artists."

"Invite him. Let me judge."

"I don't know him that well." Marie had lost her ascetic quality, Auguste noticed, and looked animated, pretty.

She went on, "If Auguste graduates from the Petite École, he might become an engraver or a cabinet-maker."

Papa growled, "He couldn't graduate from anything."

Mama said, "Poor Auguste, he is trembling like a leaf. *Mon chat*, does it mean so much to you?" Auguste nodded.

"How much do you want him to pay you for his board, Papa?" asked Marie. "Ten francs a week?"

"I am not a monster. Give what you can. But how do you know he will be admitted to the Petite École?"

"He will be admitted," Marie said positively.

Auguste ran to Marie and kissed her. Then he embraced Mama, who gave him one of her rare smiles. He wanted to kiss Papa too. But Papa was grumbling. "One daughter a tart and one a saint, and a son who is a jackass." Papa felt like Job.

A FEW days later Auguste was taken to the Petite École by Barnouvin, a tall, lean, fair seventeen-year-old; high-coloured, high-spirited, opinionated, and delighted to display his superior knowledge to this lad. He was in his second year at the school. Auguste envied the faint down on Barnouvin's chin, the start of a vandyke. Barnouvin dressed in the fashion of the day: tail-coat, tight trousers, a soft hat. He smoked a pipe and wore his hair long and curling over his open collar.

The Petite École was in a neighbourhood of schools and colleges: the École de Médecine, the Sorbonne, the École des Beaux Arts, and the Observatoire. Barnouvin told Auguste, "The Petite École was founded in 1765 by Madame de Pompadour's pet artist, Bachelier, as a school of the decorative arts. The Beaux Arts students say we haven't enough talent to get into their school. But they won't keep me out. What do you want to do?"

"I want to be a painter. I will try for the Beaux Arts too."

They entered the school through a large iron gate set in a triumphal arch. Over the entrance of the baroque building was the Latin inscription: *Utilitas—Firmitas*. Barnouvin translated. " 'Practicality—solidity.' Grand, isn't it?"

Auguste nodded. Barnouvin led him into the large, high main hall, which had been converted into a studio. The walls were decorated with drawings and paintings, mostly copies of the masters. At the rear was

an elevated platform with a wide drawing desk behind which a man was standing. Facing the desk were a model-throne, and about forty students working intently at easels. Auguste sensed that this school was a serious business.

His heart beat rapidly as Barnouvin introduced him to the man on the platform, Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran. The teacher was dark, middle-aged, with a face full of shadows; yet when he showed interest, as now, his brown eyes were bright, as if each new student was a new challenge. It was a long and lean face, with high cheek-bones and a fine forehead. Lecoq asked, "You want instruction in the fine arts?"

"Yes." How did Lecoq know? This school trained artisans.

"What makes you think you can be an artist?"

"I have been drawing since I was five, on wrapping paper."

"Oh, another poor boy. Why didn't you come sooner?"

"I was at school, studying Latin and arithmetic."

"Wasting your time?"

Auguste gave him a glance of gratitude.

Lecoq said sharply, "There are two types of student. One is a clerk, who wants to make straight lines, although there are no straight lines in Nature, who wants to draw according to rule although there are no rules in life. They usually end up in the Beaux Arts, imitating the classics. Then there are the second type, who are rare—and where they come from you never know—who, like Rembrandt, learn to see though their own eyes."

Auguste was in despair. He saw so little, so badly. "What should I do?" he cried. "I have had no training."

"So you will find your own level," Lecoq said indifferently.

Auguste said, "My papa says I'm an idiot to come here. But I have to. I can draw. I know I can."

Lecoq smiled; at least the boy could get angry. "Go ahead, draw something," he said.

Auguste sat down and picked up a black crayon. As Barnouvin's face grew under his fingers, he forgot his confusion. When Lecoq halted him, he said, "I haven't finished."

"It's sufficient." Lecoq examined the drawing, then turned to Barnouvin, "Your friend is not altogether flattering."

Barnouvin stared at the sketch. "It is a scrawl."

"I'm sorry," Auguste said. "I didn't mean to do a caricature."

Lecoq said, "It is not one. What did you say your name was?"

"Rodin. Auguste Rodin."

"You will go into the morning class for beginners."

Class began at eight in the morning and went on until noon. Auguste was one of forty. Lecoq informed him that he must first learn to draw from memory. "This is training in a manner of seeing," the teacher said. Auguste sat before a sheet of blank paper. He did not know where to start. Barnouvin was copying a drawing by Boucher, who embodied the French rococo taste of the eighteenth century, and had been the tutor of Madame de Pompadour. It would be much simpler to copy, Auguste thought.

Lecoq, standing behind him, said, "Draw something you know." He placed a pen by his side, soft and hard pencils, charcoal, smiled and walked away.

Auguste tried the pen, but found himself back with black crayon and charcoal, materials he knew. He drew a head, making the features protrude until they looked almost like sculpture. Then Auguste thought of Papa as he had looked when he had agreed reluctantly to the Petit École. Papa's lips became narrow with distaste, the jaw grew heavy, the neck thick.

Lecoq had returned. "Your father?" he asked.

"Yes." Papa looked ugly, but it was Papa.

"Monsieur Rodin, you are immoral," Lecoq said.

"But that's the way he looks," Auguste cried desperately.

"You mean that is the way you see him."

"I'm sorry, *maître*, that you don't like it, but"

"But you're not sorry you did it that way? I like that you didn't flatter. A drawing doesn't have to be pretty—it *does* have to be alive."

BARNOUVIN declared that Lecoq was the best teacher in Paris in spite of his violent dislike of the Académie.* Lecoq would say to his students,

* French art was under government sponsorship; it was controlled and guided by the Académie, the École des Beaux Arts, and the Salon, in which the artist's work was selected for exhibition by a jury of artist officials.

"Most of you come here only as preparation for the Beaux Arts, for its dry lectures, uninspired courses. You dream of having your work accepted by the Salon, of receiving government commissions and election to the Académie. But there is no more imagination there, no vitality. Everything is sweet and decorous."

It did not alter Auguste's determination to get into the Beaux Arts, but he thought that Lecoq was a remarkable man. He felt that if he didn't pay attention to Lecoq he would miss something vital.

Lecoq insisted that they soak themselves in what they saw, so that they would be able to reproduce it from memory. He also taught the various techniques of drawing.

He said one day, "Above all, we must respect the dignity and integrity of the human body." Auguste tried to draw a human figure. He sketched a torso without sex, then legs, arms, a head. Lecoq loomed up behind him.

He said, "Finish it."

"I don't know enough about anatomy," Auguste said.

"You know your own body, don't you?"

"But I can't do it from memory!"

"You should be a draughtsman then, drawing straight lines."

"I won't be a draughtsman!" Auguste stood up with such violence that he upset his drawing-board.

Lecoq looked weary, but when he saw tears in the boy's eyes—and the boy could draw—he said, "You may come to the evening life class and draw from a model."

The evening class was crowded: it was the night for the female nude model. The students here were freer, noisier and older. Most of them were eighteen, some were in their early twenties. They worked as artisans during the day and studied at night. Auguste, who had just turned fifteen, felt self-conscious.

The students formed a circle round the model. Auguste found himself at the rear, able to see only her back. He was very nervous, not sure he could look at this naked model in the presence of others. Papa would be shocked, Mama would utter Ave Marias.

Yet everyone treated it quite impersonally. Lecoq discussed the model's figure as if this were an anatomy lesson. And the model was

the biggest disenchantment of all. "A chambermaid from across the street," Barnouvin told Auguste. "Lecoq wanted a fleshy model."

Fleshy she was, Auguste thought. Even so, his heart palpitated as he got his first close look at her.

Lecoq said, "This is a typical female body. It is up to you to infuse her with your own vision. Start with the hip and thigh, to show the direction of the body."

Auguste did, then paused. All the nudes he had seen in paintings were romantic, idealized. But this model was middle-aged, not even pretty. None the less he was attracted by the insinuating profile of her back. He searched for a rhythmic line to convey motion, and tried a line that suggested an arch, forward and upward.

Then the model pivoted so that the students could view her from every angle—Lecoq believed a model should move freely, to encourage the creation of motion and reality—and Auguste was shocked. Her breasts sagged, her stomach bulged, her hips were thick, muscular. This was a slander of the female form as he had imagined it. But he copied her carefully, and Lecoq said, "Correct, and lifeless."

"I'm drawing what I see."

"What you feel. You do not see enough, *mon ami*." He liked this boy. "Let your drawing flow, Rodin. Use your eyes."

Auguste yearned to tell Lecoq that when he was far away from the model her outline blurred. Now the teacher ordered the model to rest, and she sat down with a cloak over her shoulders.

During the break Barnouvin introduced Auguste to a group of his fellow-students. Henri Fantin-Latour, four years older than Auguste, was the talker of the group, with red hair, a moustache and a beard—the typical young artist. Alphonse Legros, who wanted to be an etcher, was swarthy, short, intense. Jules Dalou, a student of sculpture, had a narrow, taut face, and was very outspoken. But it was Edgar Degas that they all listened to. At twenty-one Degas was slender, with a very long thin face and the most mocking, questioning eyes Auguste had ever seen.

Barnouvin said, "Such a heavy model—she turns my stomach."

"It's a waste of time to draw the model," said Fantin-Latour. "We should copy at the Louvre and paint from memory."

Degas said, "Draw from memory, from Nature, from anywhere—but draw. Theory is for the *canaille*, for riff-raff."

Fantin said, "Our friend Degas has learned these ideas from Ingres. He is his disciple."

"I am no one's disciple," growled Degas. "I am not an idiot, either."

"And I'm an idiot?" demanded Fantin.

Auguste thought they were coming to blows, then Degas shrugged and Fantin began arguing furiously with Legros. And Auguste realized that they just adored arguing, and were in rebellion against everything in the established art world, except Lecoq. In this there was a genuine *esprit de corps*. They were bragging now about the girls they had had, should have had, and would have. Auguste envied their free and easy conversation.

When they started to draw again, Auguste was once more at the back, and by the time he got close enough to see the model, the class was over.

Lecoq said, "Finish it at home."

The following evening, when he should have gone to bed, Auguste sat at the kitchen table trying to finish the drawing.

"Mon Dieu!" It was Papa, standing behind him, staring incredulously at his unfinished sketch.

"What is that?"

"A female figure, Papa. It's for the school." And Auguste tried to explain that this was the way one learned to draw.

"Naked! *Mon Dieu*, that I should have such a son!" Papa roared. "Eggs and bread have gone up in price, and you draw naked women!" Aroused by Papa's voice, Mama and Marie came down in their nightgowns. Papa was in a quandary: this was not a subject to discuss in front of them. He grumbled, "He's wasting your money, Marie," and tried to take the drawing from Auguste, but the boy slipped it inside his shirt.

Marie said, "Auguste, may I see the drawing?"

Auguste said, "It's not finished. The figure is heavy"

"I'm not a child," Marie said.

But Papa scowled, and Mama said nervously, "It's late. We should all go to bed." They went off to their rooms.

Auguste waited until he heard Papa snoring, then he lit a candle, and returned to the drawing. He finished the neck and shoulders, and was just starting to do the arms when he heard a "shush" and Marie stood at his side.

"It looks real," she said. "Who is she?"

"A model from the life class."

"Is Barnouvin in your class?"

"Yes. Marie, do you like Barnouvin?"

She smiled hesitantly. "Do you think he likes me?"

"He is in love with art. We all are," Auguste said with pride.

SCHOOL settled into a pattern: mornings were spent at the Petite École; in the afternoons Auguste and the others visited the Louvre to study and copy the works of the masters, and two evenings a week were devoted to drawing from life.

Auguste was fascinated by the Louvre; a new universe flowered before his hungry eyes when he saw for the first time Leonardos, Titians, Raphaels, Rubenses, Rembrandts, and Michelangelos. His men were Michelangelo and Rembrandt. Tears filled his eyes as he stood before their drawings and etchings. Michelangelo's work was vigorous, muscular, powerful; Rembrandt's rude, jarring and full of feeling. Auguste copied or drew from memory; drew equally well either way now, and carried his sketch-book with him everywhere. He found himself devoting most of his energy to torsos and heads. He preferred the male body; it was stronger than the female and there were so many more muscles in the back, shoulders and torso.

One morning Lecoq asked him, "Why haven't you come to painting class? You are about ready for it. You should start to work seriously with watercolour and oils. Unless, of course, you want to remain just an etcher."

"No, I" Auguste paused.

"You can't afford paint? Too bad."

"How are my drawings?"

"They smell of the Louvre. I sent you there to use your eyes and hands, to depend only upon yourself."

"What shall I do now?" cried Auguste.

"We are a free school and cannot afford to supply everyone with paint. Try to get some and we will see what you can do."

The next day Auguste was moved into a painting class. He told Aunt Thérèse about this and several days later she handed him a slightly used box of paints.

The colours were beautiful. In class, he hunted around for a blank canvas and found a battered one that could be scraped. When he returned to his place, he was struck dumb. His paints were gone. Someone had stolen them. He sat there throughout the period, blinking back his tears.

Aunt Thérèse was sympathetic, but said that Drolling had discovered the theft of the paint, and now everything was locked up.

At the next few classes Auguste was able to work only when he found tubes of paint discarded by the more prosperous students. But the best colours were always squeezed to the last drop. He sketched—but it seemed senseless to go on. Papa was right: he would never be anything but a workman. He decided to tear up his drawings, and had them in his hands when Lecoq stopped him. He had never seen Lecoq so irritated. "I'm the one to decide what's to be done with your drawings!" Lecoq stared at the sketches and said, "I'll keep them. But you can't sit here and do nothing."

"I'll go. I cannot afford paint or canvas."

Lecoq looked at the boy, one of his best pupils, ready to ruin his life for the lack of a few *sous*. He said, "Go to the modelling room, Rodin. At least it will keep you occupied."

"*Maître*, I don't know anything about sculpture. I'm tired." He meant sick at heart, defeated.

"And don't you think I am?" Lecoq shouted. "Do you think you are the first promising student I have lost for the sake of a few francs? Go! It will not hurt you to learn sculpture while we find a way to keep you in the painting class."

He went with Auguste to the sculpture room. Auguste stared at the wet clay, the heavy loads of plaster, the terracotta and marble, the ladders and the stands, the tools. It was a world new to him.

Lecoq said, "You are a strong lad. If you don't succeed as a sculptor you will make a good moulder or caster."

Suddenly Auguste felt drawn to the stone. There were copies of famous works that were so beautiful and potent he wanted to caress them. He felt the clay under his strong fingers and he was full of new sensations. He wanted to shout: I love this! He did not feel handicapped here because of his eyesight. He didn't have to see so much as to feel—the closer he was to the clay the better.

Day after day he worked in the sculpture room. This work, unlike the drawing and painting, passed not through his mind but through his body. In spite of the hardness and coldness of the stone, there was an enticing warmth to it. He no longer dreamed of pretty girls; he had a new love, the "Venus de Milo." When no one looked he fondled her. He was full of a new desire—to hold the stone, carve it, shape it.

Lecoq came to him one evening and said he had paint for him. Auguste said, "I have to work here, *maître*."

"Sculptors have to know how to draw too. You want to be a sculptor, Rodin?" Auguste nodded.

"It is a poor business. The only buyers these days are the government and the museums. It is an art without openings. There are no great patrons as there were for Michelangelo. And the materials are costlier."

"Perhaps," said Auguste, "but I must work with stone. May I stay here, *maître*? Please?"

"Do you think I am without a heart? Stay here, and in the life classes. More than ever, you will have to learn to draw."

Auguste wanted to thank Lecoq, but how? Never had he felt such wonder and gratitude.

Lecoq said, "Let us not get involved in thanks. Work, that will be enough. How many drawings have you made so far?"

"Five or six hundred, I think."

"You will do far more if you become a sculptor."

Auguste walked through the wet and cold night on his way home to tell Papa. A year had passed since Papa had given permission for the Petite École, but Auguste felt much older. He had measured himself: he was five feet four, a two-inch gain in the past year. And there was a tempest within him.

The family was still up; the oil lamp made a blot of light in the centre of the kitchen. It was chilly, although there was a fire.

Auguste blurted out, "Papa, forgive me, please, but I'm going to be a sculptor."

Papa looked heavenward. "You're insane!"

"I have the hands for it, Lecoq says."

Papa shouted, "You have the arms of a working man. How long will it take to be a sculptor? A year?"

"Five, if I make progress. Nothing is guaranteed, Papa, just free instruction."

Marie volunteered, "I will pay, as before."

"You are a fool, like him," Papa said. "You have eyes only for that Barnouvin, but does he have eyes for you?"

Marie's face burnt. Auguste said, "Barnouvin is one of the most promising students in the school."

Papa said, "You will die even poorer than I am. Make sure you learn how to be a stone cutter so you won't starve." He trudged up to his room, taking Mama with him.

Marie asked, "Is Barnouvin really good?"

"He is an outstanding student. But he likes many girls." He didn't want to say it, but she should know.

"He said he would draw me one of these days."

"You will make a lovely model."

Marie's delicate face grew animated and Auguste started to sketch her. In a few minutes he had finished the drawing. He was pleased with the deep-set, feeling eyes. He handed the sketch to her and said, "See if Barnouvin can do better."

Marie said gently, "I like it."

"When I get my own studio, I will do your portrait in bronze. You will see how much more expressive that will be."

AUGUSTE decided he must get into the Beaux Arts, though Lecoq said that he would be lost there. Barnouvin said he would never make it, and Degas deprecated it, though he himself applied and was accepted. Fantin-Latour was also accepted, and was immediately dissatisfied with the school; Dalou and Legros got in through influence.

For the next few years Auguste kept a back-breaking schedule. He was out of bed before the sun rose, preparing for the eighteen-hour day

ahead. With the dawn he hurried to Lecoq's studio, and the *maître* planned his work. From nine to twelve he modelled. At noon he rushed over the Pont des Arts to the Louvre. Two days a week he visited the Bibliothèque Impériale to study the drawings of Poussin, Watteau, Boucher and Fragonard. There was hardly a *sou* for food, and he nibbled bread and chocolate as he rushed about Paris.

Always hungry, often tired, he could not stop this feverish pace. From five to eight he had a course in design at the Gobelin weaving centre. After eight he went to his favourite classes: two nights a week working from the nude with Lecoq, and three nights a week studying with the famous animal sculptor, Barye. Lecoq had told Auguste, "Listen to Barye. He is the best anatomist of any sculptor today."

Barye had to teach to support himself, and he hated it. But he taught what he knew to be right. He told his students, "Anatomy is the backbone of sculpture." Auguste liked it when they studied at Barye's studio; but he was less happy when a class was held in a hospital, and the leg of a corpse was passed about to be studied. He almost fainted, and for hours felt sick. But Lecoq would not allow him to give up.

AUGUSTE fell in love with Paris. He loved the *quais* along the Seine, the open spaces of the Tuileries. These days the medieval city of narrow streets and crowded tenements was being transformed under the direction of Baron Haussmann with new streets, new gardens, new bridges. This was a Paris of wide spaces and far horizons, created for the pleasure of the eye. Auguste's sketch-book became his diary and he filled it with thousands of drawings. He had no free time. On Saturday nights he sketched from memory the figures he planned to model. On Sundays he worked on clay at home. He hid the clay in his wardrobe, covering it with an old coat, for even Mama would complain about his keeping it there. At the end of the third year of this arduous schedule Auguste felt he might be ready for the Beaux Arts.

When he asked Lecoq to recommend him for the entrance examination, Lecoq said, "Prepare a head for the committee and I will see what I can do. My name is anathema there; we will have to find someone more acceptable. A name will occur to me."

Auguste wanted to model a head of Marie, but she would not pose

for the head on Sundays because she went to church and met Barnouvin. She suggested, "Ask Papa to pose. Whatever he pretends, he will be pleased."

Auguste asked him on a rainy Sunday when Papa sat in the kitchen, very bored with nothing to do. He looked startled and affronted. "You want me for a model? What kind of a fool do you take me for?"

Auguste stood there despondent, his face so pale and weary that Papa felt sad. He didn't want to hurt his son. These eighteen-hour days were wearing the youngster to the bone. It was a great worry; Auguste had become so thin. Though Papa didn't approve of Auguste's trying to be a sculptor, he wavered. He said, "Do you think you will get into the Beaux Arts?"

"Lecoq thinks I might. I've copied heads by Houdon, but this will be my first original head."

"Well, if you can do it in one sitting."

That was impossible, but Auguste said he would try.

THE FOLLOWING Sunday Papa wore his brightest blue jersey to bring out the blue in his eyes. He was deeply disappointed when Auguste spent the entire afternoon sketching his head on paper. He said he would not sit again. But the next Sunday, when Auguste promised to start modelling the head, he allowed himself to be coaxed. Secretly, he was flattered. He sat upright and still, like the statues of Napoleon Bonaparte, until Auguste said, "You're too stiff, Papa. It's not natural."

Papa marvelled at the dexterity with which his son rolled balls of clay on the table and rapidly modelled the head. His hands were so alive as he gathered the clay in his large palms and kneaded it. But the more Auguste sought to make his father relax the stiffer he became. Finally, Auguste stuck Papa's lit pipe in his mouth. Papa relaxed, puffing on his pipe, and his features became natural.

Just as Auguste seemed to have finished, he stopped and said the nose and lips were too aristocratic. Papa was offended: he liked them like that. Ignoring Papa's protests, Auguste wiped off the features. Papa said he would not sit any more; this could go on for ever. Yet Papa was proud to think of all the people at the Beaux Arts who would see his head, and he just a police official!

A month passed before Auguste thought the head was ready. Papa liked the long, straight nose and firm chin. "But you make me too old. And what about my chin whiskers?" His fine, masculine Louis-Philippe whiskers! This head was smooth-shaven.

"I'm doing it in the style of classic Greek sculpture, which is the style of the Beaux Arts."

"Nevertheless, it is not the way I look. You must change it."

"I can't, Papa, I can't!" It was a cry from the heart.

"You think it is finished?"

"No! I'm never finished!" Auguste said that with an anguish verging on despair. "But it's the best I can do—now. Lecoq says I have to do my work the way I see it."

"Then invite Lecoq here. Let's see what he thinks about it. Or are you ashamed to have him meet your father?"

"Lecoq is busy, Papa. And besides, he is getting another artist to recommend me."

"Invite both of them," Papa said.

Lecoq came. So did Hippolyte Maindron, a renowned sculptor whose work stood outside the Panthéon and in the Luxembourg Gardens, and Barnouvin, who was Marie's guest. The family made it a festive occasion. Papa was proud, Mama was joyful. She thought the head of Papa too ugly to please anyone, but she was delighted that Barnouvin had accepted Marie's invitation. Dearest to Mama's heart was the hope of seeing Marie married.

Mama borrowed linen and good dishes from Aunt Thérèse, who borrowed them from Drolling—who was away. And Aunt Thérèse cooked the dinner.

The bust had a place of honour in the living-room. It was covered with a wet cloth until the proper time to show it.

Maindron was seated at the head of the table with Lecoq and Barnouvin on either side of him, so that he would have artists to converse with. Barnouvin, always dashing, wore a black velvet jacket, wide grey trousers, and red leather boots. Marie sat beside him. Auguste saw Mama wince at his fine clothes, as if Barnouvin were a chevalier, already out of Marie's reach.

Marie had skilfully framed her delicate oval features with a white lace collar. Her deep blue dress heightened the colour in her cheeks. She was almost pretty, thought Auguste. He was across from her, and Papa sat at the other end of the table, while Mama helped Aunt Thérèse. She was more comfortable like that; there would be no danger of her saying the wrong thing.

Papa wore a jacket of cornflower blue, and his chin whiskers were carefully trimmed. He was proud of his hospitality, and of the borrowed pastel copies of Boucher on the wall—they would show that he approved of art. But he was worried about the cost of this dinner. It would take a week's pay. And Barnouvin had such a big appetite! But he complimented Barnouvin on his vandyke beard, and Marie felt that Papa's good manners, if anything, were worse than his bad.

Maindron's appetite was astonishing too. And the more he ate, the more he talked, but not about Auguste. He said to Lecoq, "Sculptors starve to death. You are lucky you teach. I wish I taught instead of depending on patrons and the state."

Lecoq replied, "I'm interested in my pupils, the good ones, but not in teaching. It is a necessity."

Mama asked, "Are you married, *Maître* Maindron?"

Maindron said, "I take care of my mother." His voice softened. "On warm days she sits in our garden, which is full of our hopes—statues that I have spent years on, that I have been unable to sell. The clay and plaster and marble of these statues come to thousands of francs, and I will never see that money. I make believe it is a virtue to have debts, but it is no virtue to be a sculptor."

There was a deep silence. Then Auguste blurted out, "Am I crazy to try to become a sculptor?"

Maindron said, "I cannot think of any other art into which you put so much and get so little."

Auguste was numb. Papa must be full of I-told-you-so. "So I am crazy," Auguste said. "But sculpture is all I care about!"

Maindron smiled and said, "Many men do not marry the girl they fall in love with."

"If you have to be an artist," Lecoq said, "it must not be because of the enthusiasm of youth, but because you must."

"Yes," sighed Maindron. He stood up. "Where is the head?"

Auguste pulled the wet cloth off the bust. It *was* Papa! He could see it in Marie's eyes, and Aunt Thérèse was smiling.

Maindron and Lecoq were expressionless.

Maindron asked, "Your father? You left off his whiskers."

"They didn't fit the antique style," said Auguste.

"But if this is supposed to be your father, you shouldn't have copied anything except him."

"It looks like him otherwise, doesn't it, *maître*?" Auguste said. "Will I get into the Beaux Arts?"

Maindron walked round the head and said, "It has perspective. It has depth. And you haven't made the usual mistake of the academic sculptor, treating it like a picture, with a right side and a wrong side. But the Beaux Arts? Faugh!" He shook his head disparagingly.

Auguste said, "It is the finest art school in Europe!"

"Of the eighteenth century," said Maindron. "Who will pay for it if you get in?"

Suddenly Papa said, "If you think it is worth while, I will."

Maindron said, "I cannot promise your son success, monsieur. But if he has stamina, the Beaux Arts will give him a good formal education. Apply for admission," he said to Auguste, "and I will sign the application." Auguste thanked him. He tried to explain to Lecoq how much he still valued his teaching, but Lecoq cut him short. "You can continue to study with me, if you want."

"Indeed yes, *maître*, very much. And you will help, Papa?"

Papa said indignantly, "Have I ever broken my word?" But *mon Dieu*, he was thinking, what have I let myself in for with these fine gentlemen? Yet if Marie married Barnouvin, it might be worth while.

AUGUSTE hurried to his examination for the Beaux Arts with confidence. The test for the sculpture applicants was held in an enormous cold amphitheatre circled with lifeless Roman statues. In the centre was a middle-aged male model, and the applicants were placed round him. They had two hours a day for six days to complete the entire figure. That was not even enough time to finish the head, Auguste thought. The examination was a speed contest.

By the end of the second day he was still sketching the figure, when most of the applicants were half finished. Their work was taking on the same smooth gloss as the statues round the amphitheatre. But that was wrong, thought Auguste: the model's muscles sagged; to make them smooth was to falsify. Then Auguste, who could hardly see the figure, longed to use his sense of touch, but when he attempted to touch the model a cry of horror went up from the students. The examiners warned him that one more infringement of the rules and he would be barred for good.

On the last day of the examination his statue was still unfinished, but he thought it was the best figure he had done. The examiner, a distinguished member of the faculty, approached him, tottering as he walked. He was enveloped in a long black frock-coat like a pall-bearer. His silver spectacles were low on his nose, and he stared at Auguste, not at the statue. He said, "Permit me," and as Auguste stepped aside, hopeful, the examiner wrote in a large clear hand on the examination form, "Rejected."

Barnouvin, at Auguste's side, was accepted. "I did my figure in the style of Boucher," he told Rodin. "They loved it."

THE NEXT year Auguste imitated the Roman figures that circled the amphitheatre. He was finished on time. He gave his statue a shiny polish. And the examiner wrote, "Rejected."

The third year he did the body in the classic Greek style. When the figure was completed, he saw other applicants staring at it jealously. That was the best sign of all.

The examiner, the oldest and feeblest he had had so far, wrote, "Rejected," and added a line to the examination form beside the name Auguste Rodin: "No ability whatsoever. Any further examinations are a waste."

Auguste had to clutch his figure to keep on his feet. He was exhausted; his eyes were red and watery, and he could barely see. He throbbed with the ache of this injury. He felt that his life as a sculptor was ended.

Fantin-Latour greeted him at the exit. Fantin knew from Auguste's expression what had happened. He said, "It is not bad luck, though

you will think so for a time. Both Degas and I have just been rejected by the Salon, so what good was the Beaux Arts to us?"

Auguste asked, "Fantin, were you waiting to console me?"

Fantin-Latour shrugged. "Rodin, you are a born sculptor," he said. "But you are Lecoq's favourite pupil. They would never let you in. That would mean approval of Lecoq."

Auguste cried out, "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"What good would it have done? Would you have left Lecoq?"

"How could I!"

"What are you going to do now?" Fantin asked.

Sick at heart, Auguste said, "Finish with sculpture. I have to earn a living. Without a Beaux Arts degree I will not get any commissions."

"Talk to Lecoq. He may be able to suggest work."

Lecoq refused to regard the rejection as a tragedy. He said, "It was the best thing that could have happened to you, Rodin. The Beaux Arts has become a classical school full of statues of wolf-sucking Romuluses, and Hectors and Andromaches in parting embraces, all so sedate they turn one's stomach. It is full of humbug and dullness. Do you think Michelangelo needed a Beaux Arts?"

"I'm not a Michelangelo. They marked me forty-first in a class of forty-four. How could I be that bad?"

"So you are going to drown yourself! You have learned as much as you can from me. I will recommend you for suitable work."

"*Merci, maître.* But I don't want to stop studying with you. I've been wanting to do Papa's head again, but——"

"Do it again, Rodin, it will be better for you." Lecoq was smiling and Auguste smiled back.

Lecoq recommended Auguste to a decorator, Monsieur Cruchet, and Auguste went to work for him at miserly pay. Most of his work was ornamenting buildings. It was not sculpture, but it was almost the next best thing.

He continued to take an occasional class with Lecoq and Barye, but he felt in exile. He doubted that he would ever become a full-time sculptor, yet he found it impossible to stay away from modelling. When he did not put in a couple of hours of hard work with clay, he felt guilty, worthless. He worked in his room late into the night.

ONE NIGHT Auguste came upon Marie crying bitterly. Their parents were asleep, and she had thought no one could hear her. Auguste took her in his arms and she sobbed, "Barnouvin is marrying someone else."

"You're sure?" He couldn't believe her. Barnouvin had been seeing her almost every Sunday for the past two years.

"He told me. I have no dowry, and she has twenty thousand francs, enough to support him for years. A tall girl with a mighty bosom, muscular legs, and twenty thousand francs!"

He said, "I'll talk to him."

"No, no," she whispered. "He loves me, I'm sure, Auguste, but he can't stand being poor. I will become a nun."

"Marie!" The thought of losing her was too much to endure.

"Mama will like my becoming a nun. She will feel she has given a daughter to God. And it will make up for Clotilde."

"Is it what you want?"

"I can't have what I want!" she sobbed. "There is no other place to go."

"You may be right, Marie," he said with humility. "It is not easy to be rejected by somebody or something you love."

Marie was on her knees praying with all the vehemence of her devout nature. She felt almost at peace. Perhaps it was for the best; perhaps in her heart she had always been wed to God. A month later she began her novitiate in the convent of Ste. Euthyme.

Mama was not happy about Marie's decision, thinking her not strong enough for the trials ahead. She tried to appear composed, however, and said, "You will make a good nun. You have been taught to know right from wrong."

Papa was deeply upset. Yet he had to help Marie, and as they parted he pushed a small silver cross into her hand. She seemed calm as she said good-bye to her family, but Auguste felt her tremble in his farewell embrace.

She resolutely focused on becoming a good nun. She was orderly, obedient, and determined to sacrifice herself to God, but she could not forget Barnouvin. She grew pale, lost weight, became weak and ailing.

Two years passed in this fashion while Auguste, unable to model—as

if sculpture had betrayed him the way Barnouvin had betrayed Marie—struggled to earn a living as an ornamenter.

He could not work at all when Marie came home, critically ill with peritonitis. He was by her side constantly, trying to give her his strength. But the will to live had gone out of her. Her mind wandered, and she imagined herself strolling through the Bois de Boulogne with Barnouvin, or at a picnic with Auguste and Clotilde. Auguste stroked her cheek tenderly and Mama prayed, and Papa could not believe what was happening, for Rodins lived to a ripe old age.

They were sitting about her bed one evening when Marie came back to the present with a superhuman effort. She said they must forgive her for being so weak and tired. And there had been no settlement with God. She had done her best, but she could not stop feeling miserable. She felt Auguste's hand in hers. She could not see it, but she knew it was his; it was strong and flexible, a sculptor's hand. She tried to whisper this to him, but he was such a long way from her; he couldn't hear her, yet he seemed to understand.

Auguste felt Marie's hand quiver, then her fingers tightened round his and were rigid. He dropped to his knees, his face on hers, to breathe life into her, but it was too late. Papa stood stunned, Mama collapsed, and Auguste wept with an anguish he had never known before.

MARIE had been Auguste's twin spirit, friend and solace and confidante, the one person he could depend on. Now he could not face his work or his sculpture. To his troubled mind, his sculpture and his friendship with Barnouvin seemed somehow responsible for her death. He felt: I'm responsible, I must atone, and decided to take her place in the Church. He was certain Lecoq would be furious with this decision but he could not face him to explain.

One rainy winter day he began his novitiate as Brother Augustin in the monastery of the Fathers of the Holy Sacrament, situated in the rue St. Jacques. In the holy order he hoped to find peace. His family had been too shaken by Marie's death to question his decision.

The head of the order was Father Eymard, a dignified, elderly priest with a reputation as a scholar. His wide cheek-bones, thoughtful eyes and firm chin had a Roman severity, but when he smiled a light seemed

to glow about him. He greeted Auguste and said, "You were a sculptor, Brother Augustin, were you not?"

"A student, *mon père*, that was all." Auguste shifted uncomfortably in his heavy brown cassock.

"And you have finished with art?"

"It does not matter to me any more."

Father Eymard's brown eyes widened. "If one is blessed by God with artistic ability, it is not to be held lightly. One can serve beauty *and* God. Fra Filippo and Fra Bartolommeo served both, with honour and distinction."

Auguste nodded obediently, but he thought: I will never care about sculpture again.

"There is no hurry, Brother Augustin. You will find your vocation or not as it pleases God. However, one should not enter an order as an escape but as a fulfilment."

Brother Augustin tried to submit to the discipline of the order. As the newest novice he did the humblest chores. He struggled to be free of vanity, ambition, pride, the sins of the flesh: to be one with God. He sought consolation in silence and contemplation, in austerity and obedience, in solitude and prayer. He could endure the days, which were full of prayers, chores, studies, meditations; but night after night he tossed on his straw pallet. The flame of sculpture kept flickering within him. He prayed for guidance, but his mind was full of subjects to model: a Jesus on the Cross, a Magdalen with the face of Clotilde, St. John in the Wilderness.

He grew gloomy and Father Eymard watched him anxiously. One day he asked him, "Do you know Dante?"

"A little." Auguste was surprised by the question.

"I have a new edition of the *Divine Comedy* with etchings by Gustave Doré. Would you care to look at it?"

"It would be a great pleasure."

Doré's etchings had a stunning power. Auguste sat in the monastery library wishing he could draw again, and Father Eymard, guessing his mood, handed him paper and pen. Drawing his own conception of the *Divine Comedy*, gentler and more sensuous than Doré's, Auguste was contented for the first time for months.

Father Eymard glanced at his drawing and said, "Good, good, you do not abuse your time," and assigned him work in the garden, keenly aware of Auguste's need to work with his hands.

One day Auguste came upon some wood outside the garden shed and he found himself carving a figure. He had almost finished when Father Eymard came upon him. He was certain he would be punished, but Father Eymard said quietly, "Brother Augustin, would you like some clay?"

Auguste blushed, and stammered, "Yes. Thank you very much."

Father Eymard said, "You may use the shed. We are not an academy of art, but such skill as you display is a virtue."

"Would you pose for me, *mon père*?" Auguste implored, kneeling at Father Eymard's feet.

"It drives you hard, doesn't it? Well, rise, my son, you will not be able to model me from that position."

Father Eymard could pose only infrequently, and when he was absent Auguste worked from memory. He drew with charcoal on rough paper, then did a statuette as a working model. He tried not to imitate the antique or to beautify, but to interpret, to capture the essence of Father Eymard.

When the head was finished Father Eymard examined it, then said, "At least I haven't been vulgarly idealized. Do I really look like that?"

"I thought so."

Father Eymard put his hand gently on the bust and said, "I accept your judgment. It is a fine head." His tone grew lighter. "It shows me sufficiently homely to keep me from being vain, yet charged with enough emotion to make me human. Very human." He repeated that as if he wanted to remember it.

"Thank you, *mon père*."

"Thank *you*, Brother Augustin." He stood a moment in silence as if seeking guidance, then said, "We are too monastic to encourage your talents."

Auguste felt as if he were turned to stone. This was another rejection, no matter how Father Eymard worded it. Father Eymard said gently, "Not all men are suited to the contemplative life. I think you should return to the world, to sculpture. You will wither here."

"In the service of God?" exclaimed Auguste.

"God's service takes many forms," said Father Eymard. "You may very well serve Him better in the world. Don't be sad. I believe you are capable of sacrifice, renunciation, self-denial—for sculpture, but not for God."

"Then why did I come here?"

"Because you were looking for consolation. That isn't what you need, but faith and hope." Father Eymard turned to the head and added, "May I have a copy of the bust when you put it in bronze? I would like it to last."

Auguste smiled. "*Merci, mon père.* You were a very good model."

"I hope so. . . . God bless you, Auguste Rodin."*

A FEW days later Auguste left the monastery. He had been there almost a year. He was nearly twenty-three, and he had no desire to return home. He wanted to see his parents and Aunt Thérèse, but he could not live with them any more. First, he went to the Petite École.

Lecoq was there, and Auguste was shocked by his harshness. "What do you want?" he asked brusquely.

Auguste was not certain what he wanted. Lecoq had been his guiding light. He tried to say that and Lecoq cut him short.

"So you thanked me by going into a monastery."

"But I've left. I thought you would be glad, *maître.*"

"I'm glad when any of my pupils does good work."

Auguste asked, "Could I work here?"

"No! You are no longer a student; you have no place here."

"I have no place anywhere. I can't work at home, and I can't afford a studio."

Lecoq saw Auguste close his eyes to keep from crying. He strode to his desk, pulled out a dozen drawings, and handed them to Auguste. Auguste was astonished to see that they were his own, done when he had first come to Lecoq. "They seem crude now," Lecoq said. "But whenever you grow desperate, look at these, and then you will realize how far you've come."

* In 1962 Father Pierre Julien Eymard was canonized by Pope John XXIII, chiefly for his exemplary life and his work among the Paris poor.

"Not far enough."

"Auguste Rodin, you will never grow up," Lecoq said with exasperation. "You're young, you have strength. But you won't appreciate that until you don't have it any more."

Auguste said, "I must work at sculpture, *maître*. If I have learned nothing else, I have learned that."

Lecoq stared at Auguste. He was more muscular, his face had become heavier and manlier. Yet, thought Lecoq, there was still something boyish about Auguste. This pupil had a potential that few of his students had shown, but to achieve it would be a long and arduous battle. "I was an artist too, once. My studio was my life. My friends are welcome there. The key is under the mat, if I am not at home."

Auguste stood blinking tearfully. "How can I thank you?"

"Work, work, work," Lecoq cried, "until you think your hands will drop off."

That evening, when Auguste visited his parents and told them of his departure from the monastery, he informed them also that he had rented a room for himself. His parents were upset by this move, but he could not remain at home any longer. There were too many painful memories of Marie, and he had an overpowering need to strike out for himself.

Part II – The Artists

THE Café Guerbois became Auguste's new home. His room on the rue Hermel was a tiny shell, his work as an ornamenter drab, and using Lecoq's studio and studying with Barye several nights a week made him feel as if he were still a student.

But he felt like an artist at the Café Guerbois. It was in a working-class district not far from Montmartre. Many artists were beginning to live there. It was cheap, picturesque, and very Parisian. After the solitary year in the monastery Auguste had a strong need for talk and the cheerfulness of the café. Here, at the Café Guerbois, the gaslight was bright, the artists sat in one corner and the working men in the

other. The apéritifs were cheap, the portions of food generous; a customer could sit all night even if he ordered very little, and could say whatever he thought.

But the owner had only to glance at these artists to know they would never amount to anything. Fantin-Latour dressed neatly but seemed impractical. Edgar Degas would attract no art dealers with his arrogant ways. M. Manet was too easily offended. The youngest of the lot, Auguste Renoir, looked like a common labourer. Legros and Dalou, with their attitude that the future of French art rested on their shoulders, were too ridiculous; and the newcomer, Rodin, sat as dumb as a rock.

On a chilly winter evening when Paris was dark with a wet snow, Auguste arrived late at the café, and found it crowded. Degas had to be squeezed against Fantin-Latour to make room for him.

Degas snapped at him, "Rodin, there is really no place here."

Fantin said, "It's not his fault he's late. He has to help his family."

"If you're uncomfortable——" Auguste started to rise.

"Don't you dare," said Fantin, pushing him back in his chair. "Degas is in a bad humour. He has been rejected by the Salon."

"That is not true," flared Degas. "I didn't submit anything."

"You didn't because you were afraid you would be rejected. It's the same thing."

Legros asked, "Rodin, how can you do your own work and help your parents too?"

Auguste said, "I can't, most of the time." But he had to help, however much he resented the burden, for Papa had retired on half-pay and Mama was ailing. He was staring at his latest acquaintances, Édouard Manet and Auguste Renoir. They were as different as two men could be. Everyone who knew anything about painting said Manet was so brilliant that he could paint in any style. He was attractive, elegant, well-to-do, generous, and had done fine work. But at thirty-one he had not been recognized by the Salon, and he was often melancholy.

Renoir was young, slightly built, fair-haired. One of five children of a poor tailor, without any of the advantages of Degas and Manet, he was always cheerful as long as he had a paint brush in his hand. But no one took his work seriously. Auguste felt at home with Renoir, who had much the same background as his own.

Fantin went over the list of those who had been refused by the Salon. "Legros, Dalou, Manet, Degas, Barnouvin, Renoir and myself! The Salon is a fraud."

"None the less," said Manet, "I would exhibit there if they would have me. It's the only place where one sells."

Renoir chimed in, "So would I," and Dalou and Legros agreed.

Fantin declared, "I do not believe it is essential to be accepted by the Salon. But it *is* vital to be exhibited. Our work must be seen."

Degas said, "Create our own *académie de peinture*? Artists can't choose each other's paintings: nobody likes anybody else."

Fantin asked, "Don't you want the public to see your work?"

Degas said, "Not at an artists' exhibition."

Fantin turned to Auguste. "What about you, Rodin? Do you want to be exhibited?"

"Yes," said Auguste, "when I have something ready."

Fantin said emphatically, "The vital thing is to get people to look at our work. If we shout violently enough, through our friends, public figures we know, newspapers, we will make the Salon ashamed. They will have to give us our own exhibition." He grew quite wild with excitement, infatuated with his idea.

The thought of giving an exhibition outside the academic setting of the Salon intrigued all of them, eventually even Degas. Fantin said, "All we need is stamina. We will go on and on till we stir them out of their apathy. Paris will see our work after all."

To EVERYONE's surprise, not only was their project taken seriously but Napoleon proclaimed: "Numerous protests have reached the Emperor concerning the works of art rejected by the jury of the Salon. His Majesty, wishing to let the public judge . . . has decided that the rejected works of art will be exhibited in another part of the Palais de l'Industrie."

The Salon des Refusés, it was called. Fantin persuaded Manet, Legros, Dalou and Barnouvin to exhibit. Degas refused at the last minute; Renoir had nothing ready, having suddenly changed his style. Auguste decided to do a head. The thought of showing it in a public exhibition filled him with the breath of life.

He searched for a handsome, distinguished model, in the hope of impressing fashionable Paris, and found only one model he could afford —Bibi, the derelict who loitered about Lecoq's studio and slept in the court below when it did not rain. He agreed to sit, in return for a bowl of soup and occasional wine.

Bibi had a broken nose, sodden eyes, a dirty beard; his features were marked by poverty, misery and age. After Auguste had drawn dozens of sketches of him, several came alive. And once he had the clay in his hands, he grew haunted by Bibi.

There was power in the derelict's large head, and the face was a dossier of a man's fate. The broken nose fascinated Auguste. To get it just right he pressed down on it, ignoring Bibi's cry of pain. He laboured night after night. A week before the entries had to be submitted, he suddenly felt dissatisfied. He could not show the head as it was. Then the derelict vanished.

Several nights later, when Bibi staggered into the studio for more wine, Auguste knew that his doubts had been right. There was a lawless look about Bibi, and he had not caught it. He destroyed everything but the chin. He sat Bibi in a corner against the wall, propped up by an easel, and went to work hurriedly, trying to capture the tension of the skin, the curve of the nose, the protrusion of the eyelids. How much there was to learn about the human face!

When the entries closed for the Salon des Refusés, Auguste was still doing the head over. He wondered whether it was worth completing, and he asked Lecoq to look at it. Lecoq respected the first law of sculpture: never look at unfinished work. But he was curious; and he knew it was not like Rodin to waste his time. Now, when he saw the head, he said, "It's not ready."

"I know, I know! But should I continue?"

"You'll probably not sell it. He's very ugly."

Auguste, sick at heart, was about to shatter the head when Lecoq halted him.

"Wait a moment!" He was examining it thoughtfully. "You've certainly got away from the Academy heads. Did it occur to you that this nose should be boneless?"

"I'll try it that way."

"You will try every way until you find the right way for you." Lecoq smiled. "Then it will become your way."

Auguste returned to the bust with new energy, resigned to the fact that he would miss the Salon des Refusés.

AT THE OPENING of the Salon des Refusés Auguste stood in the gallery and heard the roars of derisive laughter. It was a catastrophe and he wanted to flee, even though his work was not there. Degas took his arm, saying, "Lucky that we didn't exhibit," and steered him towards the painting that was evoking the most scorn.

It was a painting by Manet called "Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe." The subject was a picnic, with two well-dressed artists sitting on the ground beside a nude woman. It was the proximity of the nude woman to the clothed men that was evoking derision and cries of "Scandalous!"

"I like the nude," said Auguste. "She is so vividly real."

"But why is everybody so shocked?" said Degas. "Giorgione did this theme three hundred and fifty years ago and it was considered a masterpiece."

Auguste said, "I prefer Manet's."

Manet was approaching, looking flushed and irate. "I am ruined!" he shouted. "Will they ever hang me at the Salon now?"

"You expect to go your own way, yet be accepted," said Degas. "It is not possible."

Manet shrugged. He longed to be accepted by the academicians, the Salon was his world—but inside him was a secret self that kept forcing him to find his own vocabulary. In his painting he could no longer be merely charming and entertaining. He was miserable when he did not paint what he saw and felt.

"Don't be ashamed," said Degas with surprising fervour. "If fame belongs to you, you will not be able to escape it. I like your painting, but that doesn't matter. El Greco did not think Michelangelo could paint. Velázquez was contemptuous of Raphael. So how can we judge? We are all too close, too involved." Degas sighed. "Too anxious for a perfection we will never find."

The others were quiet, arrested by what Degas had said. Suddenly the gallery was oppressive to Rodin: there was so much mediocrity and

conventionality here; but Manet's picture caught the attention immediately with its clear tones, its luminosity, its superb design. They couldn't take that away from Manet.

The Emperor Napoleon III visited the Salon des Refusés and declared that the work was scandalous, vulgar, indecent, blasphemous—his denunciation was aimed chiefly at Manet's picture. He wondered if it was really useful to encourage art. Napoleon III had a genius for changing his mind.

Auguste was busier than ever the next few months, working as an ornamenter to support himself, to help his family, and to pay for his clay and Bibi's wine. He modelled in a fury, whenever he had the opportunity, always at night, when he was very tired. Many nights he lay down to relax for a moment and fell asleep fully clothed.

His constant thinking about Bibi brought him a new conception. This head must in some way personify Michelangelo. Auguste studied pictures of the great Florentine as an old man. Bibi's skull was larger, which amused him, but there was the imprint of misery, age and toil on both faces; features ravaged by striving, the forehead bent in, the nose a ruin. He took the week-end off. He forced Bibi to pose for four hours in a row, and he worked for forty-eight hours without stopping. And now it was over. "The Man with the Broken Nose" had as much as he could give it. He carved his signature at the base, his first signature —A. RODIN—and submitted the piece to the Salon.

"The Man with the Broken Nose" was rejected by the Salon of 1864 as being grotesque. Auguste was so deeply disappointed that he decided not to do any more heads.

ONE DAY he was carving the ornaments of a theatre, working on the caryatides and foliage of the façade, when he saw a handsome young woman approaching. It was a lovely spring morning, and he stopped working to stare at her. Unlike most Parisiennes, who were sallow-skinned and short, she was tall and rosy-cheeked and looked freshly scrubbed. He knew she was a working girl because of her dark blue dress and bonnet, but she walked with distinction. She carried her head with such erect pride that he longed to model it.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "how well you walk!"



She paused, not intending to answer, but caught by his intensity. She asked suspiciously, "Why are you interested in the way I walk?"

"I'm an artist." He pointed to the figures he was carving.

"You don't look like an artist." He wore a working man's blue blouse and baggy trousers.

"I'm a sculptor. What do you do?"

"I'm a seamstress. I'm from Lorraine, from Joan of Arc's province. But I'm going to be a milliner some day. I'm very good with a needle."

Despite the clothes that covered her from fingertips to toes, it was apparent that she was built like a Venus, a buxom peasant Venus. He sighed and said, "Magnificent!"

She started to walk away, but he moved after her, blocking her way. He was impressive, she thought, with his thick chest and broad shoulders, a bull of a young man, although he was hardly any taller than

she was. She liked his strong aquiline features, the high cheek-bones, the searching blue-grey eyes and reddish-brown hair.

"Mademoiselle, would you pose for me?" he asked. "I want to model your head." How could he tell her that he could not pay her? "Then we can have dinner if you like."

She looked impressed, and he added, "You have a fine head." She had wide cheek-bones, a firm chin, large brown eyes and thick, dark silky hair which she wore in a long braid. He could imagine her running through the fields, wading joyously in a country stream. "I can meet you after work," he said.

Ordinarily she would have walked away then. She was a good girl, but he was more interesting than other men she had met. He did not put on airs, and there was a reassuring shyness in him.

He asked, "What time should I call for you?"

"No! No!" She would lose her job. "Meet me here at eight."

"What do they call you?"

"I was baptized Marie Rose Beuret, but they call me Rose."

"I'm Auguste Rodin. I will be waiting for you."

When Rose did not appear at eight he was sure she would not come. And when she arrived half an hour late, he took her straight to Lecoq's studio. It was in a fine old stone building on the quai Voltaire, and Rose could see the Seine and Notre Dame from the windows. She had no chance to admire them, however; he lit the stove and lamp and ordered her to sit.

Rose was surprised by the disorder and dirt of the studio. The only clean place was the area where he worked. There was just one piece of sculpture, the head of an old, ugly man in the corner. It made her shiver. Everywhere else were easels, paints, stands, palettes, brushes, pictures. She felt she had been deceived, and also she was famished. She cried, "This isn't your studio!"

"A painter allows me to use it. Will you please sit still?"

"I'm hungry," she said.

"Fine. It will give your expression more feeling. And you will enjoy your dinner more afterwards." He encouraged her to talk, pretending to listen as he sketched her over and over, and gradually she relaxed. Her face had a simple gravity that reminded him of Marie.

Finally he took her out to eat. It was quite late, and he ordered very little, and she did also, wanting to please him. Auguste was grateful that she was considerate of his purse.

THE NEXT few weeks she posed for him regularly. There was no flirtation. One night he lost his temper with her. She had stirred at the wrong time, just when he had been on the verge of getting her mouth right. She said she was finished; and he felt desperate as she started for the door. He mumbled, "I'm sorry." She paused, and he added, "Forgive me, Rose, *ma petite amie.*"

Rose knew he meant the intimate phrase only as a sop, but she was pleased. It seemed strange that he took such pains drawing her head and virtually none with her. And when she praised the head, he retorted, "It is not right."

One evening she could no longer endure being treated so coldly. She said, "Auguste, why can't we have a picnic this Sunday?"

He realized he had to treat her as a woman, or she could not go on. "We will go," he stated, "when I finish."

"You will never finish, never, never." She started to weep.

"Don't you realize that when I finish you'll look like a queen?"

"No, I won't, I'm a seamstress and I'll look like one."

"Rosette, look at the head. It is almost finished." He ran his fingertips over her eyes, his powerful fingers drying her tears. She had not known he was capable of such tenderness.

"You do like me, Auguste?"

"Yes, yes, I do." All at once he longed to kiss her. He was certain he did not love her, yet there was a pain and a loneliness in him when she was away that surprised him. He could feel her waiting for him to caress her; but if he did, she would try to possess him.

"Auguste, will you take me out on Sunday?"

"Yes." He decided that he must stop seeing her as soon as he finished the head.

On Sunday he took her to the Luxembourg Gardens, which had the best outdoor statuary in Paris. Also it was near the studio, in case he wanted to work later. For Rose, it was enough to have Auguste close, treating her like a woman, not a model.

It was a lovely June day, with the kind of clear blue sky that Auguste called a painter's sky. The mild sun encouraged leisurely strolling. The Luxembourg was peaceful and Rose liked it. She admired the stately elms, the sturdy chestnut trees, the gardens full of flowers. And the couples sitting arm in arm on the benches, the mothers and nursemaids and children, all made her aware of love.

Auguste showed her every piece of statuary in the gardens, and it seemed to her that there were thousands: Neptunes, Dianas, queens, poets, artists, statesmen. Her gaiety evaporated. He was telling her about the Parthenon, and she did not know what he was talking about. To change the subject, she said, "Are your parents alive? You never talk about them."

"What is there to talk about?"

"Don't you like them? I like mine." Rose, just turned twenty-one, missed her parents very much.

Auguste shrugged. He pointed to a Venus. "Isn't she beautiful?"

She thought the statue brazen. She wished she were in the rue de Rivoli, where everybody was properly dressed and she would not have to feel apologetic about her ignorance. She ventured, "Isn't your father proud of your being a sculptor?"

"He says I will never make a franc as a sculptor."

"What about your mother?"

"Mama? She lives behind a black veil now." He kicked the pebbles under foot, irritably.

"You go to see them, don't you?"

"About once a week. They live near by."

She longed to ask why he hadn't taken her to meet them, but didn't dare. Instead, she said, "You're a Parisian, so I suppose you have known many women."

He said sarcastically, "I've had hundreds of mistresses."

"Hundreds?"

He said with a flourish of his hand, "Every statue I've started, every statue I've admired was a mistress."

"Oh!" She laughed, almost hysterical with relief.

He stared at her intently, then suddenly swept her broad-brimmed, flowered hat off her head. "You mustn't hide your face."

"Do you like it?"

"You have good features, an excellent complexion."

She took his hand, and he let her hold it. Then, as if this were a kind of capitulation, he withdrew it. He said, "Now your face is expressive because you are upset. Why can't you be as expressive when you pose?"

"You are impossible!" she cried. But she was stirred by the grave sensuality of Auguste's expression. He was looking at her as if her physical beauty overwhelmed him. "Rosette, we are near the studio. If we hurry, we can get there while the light is still good." He took her by the arm, gently, as if she had become precious.

There was still sun in the studio and he seated her in the model's chair. What a virginal skin! It took the light so well! She would make a wonderful nude. He modelled quickly; his fingers moved of their own accord. She sat well, quiet yet alive; she made him feel in flood tide with the plenitude and power of life.

The sun went down and there were shadows in the studio; he could barely see her. But the head was life-like now. He leaned over to kiss her, to thank her, and then he realized that the neck was unfinished. He didn't kiss her. Instead he ripped open her dark blue blouse. She tried to button it and he stopped her; now he could model the neck. He saw her staring at his muscular arms, at his chest—he had opened his shirt to be cool. And suddenly they came together, she desiring him even more than he wanted her.

Afterwards Rose was stricken with shame. She had been in ecstasy, but now she was full of guilt. She knelt on the floor, praying to God for forgiveness. She said, "I can never return here."

"Well, you can't go to my room. It is too small, too poor. And we must finish the head."

She felt like a fool. He did not love her, he only wanted to model her. Artists were insane. She dressed hurriedly, on the verge of tears. She refused to let him walk her home, or to make an appointment for another sitting. The instant she was dressed she fled.

AUGUSTE told himself he did not care, but the next few evenings, as he sought to work on Rose's head from memory, he cared very much. One evening he waited for her where he had first met her. His clothes were

clean, his long hair neatly trimmed. He felt anxious, morose, pessimistic.

The time that she should have left work passed, and she did not appear. Perhaps she was avoiding him. Just as he was sure of this, he saw her approaching.

When she saw him she hesitated, but as he hurried towards her she ran to meet him. They met in the road and were almost hit by a carriage going by. He took her outstretched hands, his pleasure obvious. But he did not like to take her to Lecoq's studio. He tried to explain, and she said, "Why don't you get your own studio?"

"I can't afford it."

"I could help," she said, "and if—*when* you sell my bust, you can pay me back."

"No, no." It wasn't pride; but if they lived together there would be responsibilities; it would endanger his freedom.

Rose seemed to read his mind. "I'll stay only until you finish the head, and you will be able to work on it as much as you like." She prayed to the Virgin to forgive her this lie, but she loved him. "I'll leave the moment the head is done."

"You wouldn't have to leave," he said, thinking he would like to do a full-length figure of her before their affair ended. "Not until we both feel like it."

"And if it doesn't work out, you would still have your studio."

He wondered if she was actually so guileless. Well, she was entering this situation of her own free will.

"I have a hundred and twenty francs saved," she said. "Here!" She pulled out a handkerchief containing the notes.

Auguste was shaken. She must have gone without many meals to save this. "It is very nice of you to offer it to me."

"It will be even nicer if you accept."

Auguste knew he should refuse but to have his own place to work He said, "Remember, this is just a loan."

"Just a loan," she repeated with a smile, but her heart sank.

Auguste started to walk away, absorbed in the thought of his studio. Rose stood as if paralysed, and suddenly he remembered her. He turned back and said abruptly, "*Merci*, Rose."

"It is my pleasure." She could not keep the hurt out of her voice.

"Come. We'll eat. Oh, not with this," he said, putting her handkerchief with the francs in his pocket. "I've saved several francs for us. We'll celebrate with sausages and wine." Auguste for the first time linked his arm in hers and escorted her to a restaurant.

WITH THE help of his friends Auguste found an old stable in the rue Le Brun, close to where he had been born. He stood in the doorway while Fantin, Degas, Renoir, Dalou and a new friend, the husky, good-looking Claude Monet, surveyed the premises.

Degas studied the leaky roof, the mildewed walls, the cracked windows, the doors that did not fit, the floor that was part earth and part cement, the draughty and bone-chilling interior. He said, "It's big enough, if you don't get pneumonia."

Auguste said, "I'll put a stove in."

Degas added, "Whatever you are paying for this, you are being cheated."

"At least," Monet said, "he will have his own place to work."

"With mittens on his hands, smoke in his throat, and icy feet," Degas said. "He is mad."

Auguste interrupted to say, "I have a room next door."

Dalou investigated it and reported, "With an iron double bed and a place to cook. Who is she?"

Renoir said, "It is none of your business." He turned to Auguste. "Are you still working for the decorator?" he asked.

Auguste nodded, and burst out, "I do nothing I believe in, nothing I care about. I am tired of prettiness, of bodies that are impossibly elegant. I understand why Michelangelo preferred the male body. It is more difficult to make it pretty and refined."

Renoir smiled sadly and said, "*Mon ami*, I've had the same education. At twenty I was painting window blinds with decorative figures from Poussin, Boucher, Fragonard. They were the most beautiful blinds you ever saw. When I left, having saved enough to study at the Beaux Arts, my boss said I was an idiot. He said if I learned to paint on canvas I would lose all my skill with window blinds."

Fantin said, "Manet is showing a new picture soon, 'Olympia.' It is a new thing in nudes, with a body we can all recognize."

Degas said caustically, "You like everybody."

"I do not," insisted Fantin. "Sometimes I don't like Degas."

"That hardly makes you a connoisseur," said Degas. "Sometimes I don't like Degas either."

Auguste was tired of all the disputing, and he didn't want his friends to meet Rose, who was due soon. As he led them out of the stable, Monet said to him, "I was born near here," and Auguste replied. "So was I." They compared notes and discovered that they had been born only two days apart. Their fathers had gone to the same *Mairie* on the same day to register their births.

ROSE WAS appalled by the dirt and draughtiness of the stable studio, but Auguste did not ask her opinion. He showed her where he would work, where she would pose; and the mere sight of him, the way he moved, was sufficient to make her surrender to him.

She moved in with the small trunk she had brought from Lorraine. She was certain the concierge knew they were not married, and it lessened the joy of being with Auguste. He stood at the window, filled with the pride of proprietorship, but she felt so tired, so weak, she was on the verge of collapsing. Whatever cemented them seemed about to dissolve. But the thought of breaking off was even worse. When he said, "We will fix up the studio," she replied, "Yes, we will make it a home." He looked at her suspiciously, but as she cleared a place for him to work he gave her a thank-you kiss. The ugly stable was suddenly filled with a bright light and she resolved to make everything shine.

Housekeeping became her god. She cooked and cleaned and made sure Auguste's tools were where he could lay his hands on them instantly —he was always losing them—and kept the cloths wet on the unfinished clay models. She discovered that he liked cabbage soup with pieces of pork and fish, and had it often, for it was cheap. She was determined to make him happy. She smiled even when she did not feel gay, and sang when he wasn't working; when he was, all noise was forbidden.

Auguste's work went on at a merciless pace. He was doing small decorative figures that were copies of Cellini and Donatello. His hands grew stronger, his plastic skill increased. But discontent gnawed at him. The more time he spent on other people's work, the more he

craved to do his own. He was dissatisfied with the head of Rose, and nothing seemed worth while.

In this disgusted mood, he rose with the sun one Sunday, unable to sleep, and went into the studio. He was angry that Rose had not stirred —he was hungry. Knowing he was being unreasonable, he burst into the bedroom to waken her.

Rose was standing in her night-gown, and as soon as he saw her he knew what was wrong with the bust. It should be done with her hair down, as she was now. He pulled her to the model stand. She began to cry—had he gone crazy? It was immodest to pose this way.

"Stand still!" he shouted when she tried to retreat.

Rose looked terrified, thinking she ought to flee. But Auguste was working as he hadn't worked for weeks, and she grew quiet, fascinated. Rose sat all day without food or rest. Just as she felt she could bear it no longer, he halted, with the first smile she had seen for a long time. He said, "Rosette, I have it. 'Mignon' is done."

She did not believe him. She sat as if paralysed.

He glared at her. "You don't like the head. You never did."

"Auguste, I do like the head. I hope 'Mignon' is in marble some day," she said with sudden longing.

"She would be better in bronze. Marble would make her too pretty."

"You don't think I'm pretty?"

"No model is pretty to an artist," he declared, "unless she is worth doing in the nude."

She had always shrunk from letting him see her naked, but finally she gave in. The next Sunday she was out of bed before him. She lit the stove and put the breakfast on. She wore her coat, but nothing else. And when he entered the studio, she stood up and let the coat fall at her feet. She was very white, standing as if in a trance, her eyes closed, on the verge of fainting.

She felt his touch. He said, "Straighten up. No, no, not stiff—move about. The body is more natural in motion."

Rose opened her eyes. A look of approval was on his face. She was perfect. Not that he was surprised; his touch, his most treasured sense, almost always infallible, had told him that she was beautifully formed. He said, "You have nothing to be ashamed of."

"I've taken care of myself."

"Yes, Rosette, and Nature has taken even better care of you."

He was sketching her while he spoke. Then he went at the clay, building the figure, cutting, stripping, adding until he had established the body in its layers and functions. He worked tirelessly, and she did not complain.

The next few weeks, as the figure, which he called "Bacchante," developed, Auguste's humour improved. But he still had not told Rose that he loved her, words she craved with all her heart.

EARLY THAT summer, Rose suspected that she might be pregnant. One moment she was afraid, the next she wanted it to be true. She went to the doctor, and he confirmed her suspicions, assuring her that she was in perfect health and should give birth to a fine child, probably in January. She was elated, until dread of Auguste's reaction stifled her happiness. Nevertheless she was filled with an immense longing for the child. Ever since she could remember, Rose had desired to be a mother. She yearned to discuss it with another woman, but with whom? Her family was in Lorraine, and Auguste hadn't introduced her to his.

Sometimes she thought Auguste too would feel triumphant; then she was certain he would be furious, throw her out or order her to get rid of the child. She toyed with the idea of going back to Lorraine, but she could not leave Auguste. Finally she decided to hide her pregnancy as best she could, although this would be difficult, for Auguste was still working on the "Bacchante." She posed with her belly held in, though she was afraid it would hurt the child and many times she had severe pain afterwards.

As the weeks passed the pregnancy became more difficult to conceal. All that saved her for the moment was Auguste's absorption. He was determined to finish the "Bacchante" for the Salon of 1866. Manet's utterly realistic nude, "Olympia," had created a scandal at the Salon of 1865, and Manet was not enjoying his martyrdom. Auguste had no desire for martyrdom either, but what good were eyes if you failed to paint or model what you saw? He said, "Rose, if this statue succeeds, I'll have a Venus to rival the 'Venus de' Medici.' "

He could tell that she didn't know what he was talking about. He grew irritated. "Don't you care anything about art?"

"I like Fra Angelico. I've seen his pictures in church."

"And Michelangelo and Rembrandt? What about them?"

"Well, I don't know enough to say." Seeing his anger, she said softly, "You mustn't ask me about these things. I'm not an educated woman." She could neither read nor write except to sign her name, but she loved him very much—indeed, more now that she carried his child. "If I sewed, would it disturb you?"

"Why do you want to sew?" he asked suspiciously.

Rose couldn't tell him that one of these days she would be unable to go on working at the shop. She said, "I could sew while you are modelling, make more francs."

Auguste glared at her. Imagine trying to model a Venus with a needle in her hand!

"Forgive me, Auguste, for being a poor model today, but I'm tired." Suddenly she felt nauseated and had to run into the other room. She was relieved, although also hurt, when he did not follow.

She returned a few minutes later, looking pale, and said, "I can pose some more if you like."

"No, no," he started to say, then paused. Now he knew what was wrong with the "Bacchante"—he had the belly wrong. "Wait a moment. Stand."

Rose stood, trying to control her trembling.

Auguste felt her stomach, then the "Bacchante." His frown grew. Her stomach was so developed . . . he stared at her and she burst out crying, and then he knew.

"It's true," she whispered. "I went to a doctor."

"When is the child due?"

"January, the doctor said. You're glad, aren't you, Auguste?"

"Glad?" he shouted. "Did I ask for a child? As it is, we can barely support ourselves." He was tempted to break with her, but she looked so helpless, and it was his child.

She asked hesitantly, "Could you tell your mother?"

"No. If I told anyone it would be my Aunt Thérèse."

"Then you do want the child, *chéri*? After all?"

He was suddenly filled with self-pity. He had come from nothing, he would remain nothing. How could he take on one more commitment? But she wouldn't understand. He said, "I'll talk to my Aunt Thérèse. She'll know what to do."

Aunt Thérèse knew very well. She had lost her prettiness, her hair had turned grey, her trim figure had shrunk, but she was still energetic and used to this kind of emergency. She said they must have the child and she wanted to meet Rose.

Aunt Thérèse came to the studio, and she and Rose got along at once. They talked woman talk: what would be needed for the baby, what Rose should eat and wear. Aunt Thérèse was so matter-of-fact about Rose's pregnancy that Auguste's anxiety lessened.

Walking Aunt Thérèse home afterwards, he brought up the subject of marriage. "You never married, Aunt Thérèse, and you've managed."

"It would have been better for my boys if they had had a father. I don't want you to make the same mistake."

"It would be a bigger mistake if I married her."

"I don't think so. She has good character. Besides, the way you are living is like being married."

"No, it is not. I can leave her. Other men do."

"You are not other men. You are Auguste Rodin."

"I'm nothing," he said bitterly, "and when the child is born I'll be less."

"You are a sculptor," Aunt Thérèse said proudly. "Rose will help you, she worships you. You would be very foolish to throw her devotion away."

"But I don't love her, at least not the way she loves me."

"Love is never equal, Auguste. You should know that."

"I won't be able to work with a baby around."

"I could take care of it. I would love to have a child in the house again. Or Mama could; it would bring her back to reality."

"No, no, don't tell Mama or Papa. Not yet."

Aunt Thérèse came to stay with Auguste and Rose as the time of birth approached, and he slept in the studio. He hired an extra stove for the bedroom, and Rose was pleased by his consideration, and tranquil because Aunt Thérèse was with her.

The baby, a boy, was born in a lying-in hospital on January 18, 1866. Now Rose was sure Auguste would say he loved her. Instead he stood by her bed and stared at the squalling infant, with its puckered-up face —grotesque, wizened. Did it have to be so noisy?

Rose cried out in despair, "Aren't you going to kiss me?" and he saw Aunt Thérèse frowning. He bent over and kissed Rose and said, "I'm glad it is a boy, *ma chatte*."

"Yes," she said. "We'll name him after you."

At the *Mairie* of the *arrondissement* several days later, Auguste registered his son's name as "Auguste Beuret." Aunt Thérèse, who had accompanied him, was shocked. This was cruel. She asked angrily, "Aren't you even going to give him your name?"

"He has Auguste. It is enough."

"Rose will be very unhappy. Don't you love her at all?"

"One doesn't get love by asking for it. It is either there or not, and no one can do anything about it. I'll give her a present—'Mignon,' cast in bronze."

Rose was not interested in owning "Mignon." She was deeply hurt by his refusal to give their son the name of Rodin, yet she had not the strength to resist him or to escape him. He was her first love, her only love. With all her passionate nature she was sure she would never care for anyone else. Between Auguste, who was the hard stone, and the infant, who was the soft, she felt caught in grinding millstones.

He returned to the "Bacchante" when Rose was able to pose again, but it went badly. The figure, his first full-length nude, was the most difficult work he had attempted, and the baby was driving him mad. *Petit* Auguste cried constantly, and when Rose posed she was distracted. After weeks of torture he told her that they must give *petit* Auguste to his family. "You can see him every week, and when he is older you can have him back." Rose burst into tears. The baby joined in. Angrily, Auguste strode out of the house, and he did not return that night.

Rose was so grateful when he came back for breakfast next morning that she agreed to leave their baby with his parents for the time being. She was physically sick at the idea, but Auguste made love to her that evening for the first time for weeks.

She was pleased at the thought of meeting his family, though also

afraid. Family was the core of her existence; she had missed her own more than anything since she had come to Paris. Walking to his parents' house from the studio, she prayed that they would be merciful about her unmarried condition and understand that it was not her choice.

It was noon when they arrived. Aunt Thérèse opened the door, and Papa and Mama stood behind her. Papa looked grim, Mama vague and indecisive. Rose bowed respectfully and Auguste introduced her. "This is Rose, and our child, Auguste."

Papa and Mama just stood there, saying nothing, and Aunt Thérèse explained, "*Petit* Auguste is six weeks old. Isn't he healthy-looking? Your first grandchild, Jean!"

Papa solemnly inspected the baby, in a carriage lent by Aunt Thérèse, and Mama followed his example. Rose said timidly, "He is the image of Auguste, isn't he? The same mouth and eyes."

"Nonsense," said Papa. "Auguste has lighter eyes."

Auguste came to Rose's defence. "He looks like both of us."

Papa grumbled, "I might have been consulted sooner."

Auguste said, "If the child makes you unhappy, we can leave."

"Oh no!" cried Mama. "The child does look like both of you. And a little bit like you, Jean."

"Me, too?" Papa was surprised.

Rose ventured, "We would like to think so, Monsieur Rodin. It would make us very proud." She lifted little Auguste gently from his carriage and handed him to Papa.

Papa stared at the infant squirming in his arms and saw that the napkin had slipped and the baby's bottom was bare. "*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed. "He'll catch cold."

Mama adjusted the napkin, saying, "I used to do this very well."

Rose said softly, "Monsieur Rodin, I hope you will forgive me for bringing the baby to dinner. If *petit* Auguste is too much of a burden . . ."

"Burden!" Papa exploded. "He is my grandson, isn't he?"

Rose, pathetically charming in her simple brown dress, nodded and said, "Yes, if you don't mind."

"Mind?" said Papa. "I can tell by his hair—all Rodins have red

hair." He knew he should be stern; to have a child without marriage was a sin, but the child's helplessness was appealing. He smiled at little Auguste, seeking to coax a smile from him. This infant was all that he had of the future, Papa thought. How could he reject his own blood? He was going blind, ageing fast; he had lived in terror of Auguste being childless, of his branch of the family dying out. *Petit* Auguste had come to the rescue. And Rose was a good girl, not one with fancy airs. Papa said, "He is going to be a big, fine boy. I can tell by the way he is gripping my arm that he is a Rodin. Come in. Mama, is dinner ready?"

"Almost," said Mama. She took Rose by the hand and led her inside, and the others followed.

Where, Auguste wondered, had Rose acquired these easy manners? She was at home with his parents in a way she had never been with him. Was it because she did not have to apologize for her lack of education with them?

It was one of Mama's best meals. Rose discussed cooking with her, and the bringing up of children with Papa, until Auguste said, "The baby has caught several colds in our studio. It is badly heated and until I move, which will take a few months, the child will have a hard time."

Papa said, "Auguste, why don't you say it? You want us to take care of the child for a while. Rose, what about you?"

"Monsieur Rodin, I would——"

"Papa," he corrected her.

"Monsieur Papa," she said, "we would be greatly honoured but——"

"You would prefer to keep this treasure for yourself," said Papa. "I do not blame you. You are a good mother. But we will always have a piece of meat for our grandson, and a pot of soup. I may not have a taste for museums, like my son, but I understand young love."

Rose's eyes filled with tears, and she threw her arms round Papa and kissed him.

Papa blinked to hide his own emotion and said, "See, I am not such an ogre after all."

"I know you will be good to our little Auguste, Monsieur Papa," Rose said.

"I will sit with him when he eats, punish him when he doesn't,"

said Papa. "Put him to bed with Mama, and take him to church when he is older. And we will expect you to visit us every week."

When it was time to depart, Rose burst into tears. "Forgive me," she sobbed. "But I'm going to miss him so."

"I'll bring him over," said Aunt Thérèse, "when Auguste isn't modelling."

"So will I," said Mama. Her face lit up in a way Auguste hadn't seen since Marie's death. Mama could tell that Rose was a good girl; perhaps Auguste would marry her one of these days. He needed someone like Rose to look after him.

Papa brought out Cointreau; Auguste slipped some francs into Mama's hand; Aunt Thérèse began a country lullaby to soothe the infant. Rose smiled now; she had become part of a family.

IN THE DAYS that followed, there was a new surge of passion and tenderness between Auguste and Rose, and the "Bacchante" was reborn. Rose, a good wife in bed, continued to be a servant in the studio and a model in the evenings and on Sundays. Auguste went to work with zest to model her into the image of a wild, carefree, lusty goddess. The "Bacchante" shot up over six feet tall, buoyant, abandoned. He was unhappy about the armature, which was of inferior metal, but it was all that he could afford.

When he finished the "Bacchante," he embraced Rose and said, "This one should make the Salon!"

Rose asked, "Can we visit *petit* Auguste now?" They hadn't seen the baby for weeks, he had been so preoccupied with modelling.

"Later, later," he said, struck with a new idea. "Get back on to the stand."

"I thought you said the 'Bacchante' was finished." She was disheartened enough to scream.

"Put your arms out as if you were holding the infant. I'm going to do something you will like."

The posing went on for several weeks, but she modelled willingly, for he was doing a foot-high figure of her with an infant in her arms. When he showed her the completed sculpture, he was touched by her emotion. He had it cast in bronze, though it took the last *sou* he had

saved, and gave it to Rose as a reward for posing for the "Bacchante." She pressed the mother and child close to her heart; she would treasure this gift all her life.

A FEW DAYS later Auguste received his first commission. Dr. Harneau, sent to Auguste by Fantin-Latour, was a middle-aged Parisian who had just been appointed to the École de Médecine as a teachér. He needed a bust for their foyer, and he wanted to look distinguished, for a hundred francs. This was a penurious fee, but it was the first money Auguste had been offered for his work and he agreed. Dr. Harneau said, "Have you noticed that I resemble Napoleon?" He was as short as the conqueror but Auguste saw no other resemblance. He nodded, but he made Dr. Harneau look like a little businessman with fat jowls, and when the doctor saw the finished bust he snatched his top-hat and rushed out before Auguste could ask for the fee.

Auguste told Fantin-Latour about this and his friend said, "*Mon ami*, you should have made him handsome."

"Would you have done it?"

"Why do you think I do still lifes?"

To make up for this disaster, Fantin-Latour sent Auguste a pretty young lady, with the advice, "Make her pay in advance." But before Auguste had mentioned his fee, Mlle. Dubois told him that she wanted a simple head, something for seventy-five francs, preferably done in one sitting, and would he please make sure his studio was warm. She got chilled very easily.

Auguste spent the fee on his materials and the day of the first sitting he had no wood for the fire. Desperate, he sent Rose out to find fuel. She returned with two pairs of old leather work shoes she had found in a rubbish bin. She threw them into the stove to rekindle the dying fire, and soon the stench of the burnt leather became overwhelming. When Rose threw water on the stove, the smell became worse. The sitter cried, "I don't feel well," and fainted. When they threw cold water on her to revive her it gave her a chill and she threatened to sue Auguste for damage to her health.

It was too risky, Auguste decided, using this studio for commissions. He told Rose that he was going to find a better studio.

He found a studio that pleased him in the boulevard du Montparnasse, for only twenty francs more than he had been paying. But there was one problem: he had no money with which to move.

Through Papa he borrowed a cart, but he could not afford a horse. He consulted Fantin-Latour, and as usual Fantin had a remedy. He said, "We will all help you move—Renoir, Dalou, Monet, Legros and Degas."

"Degas and Dalou? They wouldn't soil their hands."

"Degas might, for a chance to criticize your new studio."

The morning of the move they all appeared, sauntering in one by one, united only in their curiosity about Auguste, who was so secretive about his private life and his work. They had heard rumours about a girl living with him. Auguste, however, had sent Rose over to his parents. His private life was none of their business.

They paused to examine his sculpture before they loaded it. Fantin said, "You've done a lot of work, Rodin. You're as secretive as our friend from Aix, Paul Cézanne."

Renoir remarked, "Cézanne thinks we should have another Salon des Refusés."

"Because he was turned down by the Salon," said Fantin. Then looking at the "Bacchante," "I wager Rodin is taking the Salon seriously."

They began to pack his belongings on the cart. Dalou and Fantin came upon "The Man with the Broken Nose." Dalou disliked it; Fantin admired it. Degas said, "You have a genius for ugliness, Rodin."

"That's what the Salon thought. They rejected it."

"They're not ready for your work," said Fantin.

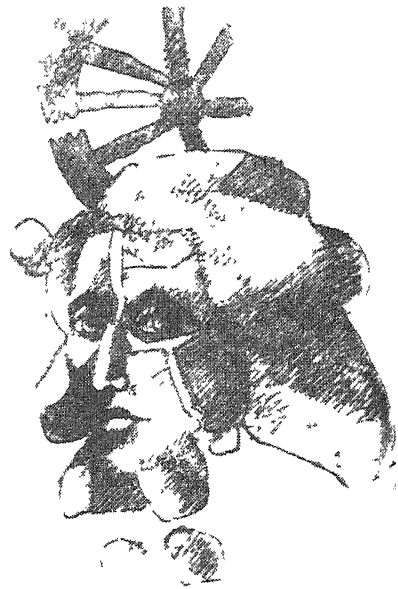
Auguste said wryly, "Most people aren't."

The "Bacchante" was carefully packed in the cart. As Auguste draped her with wet cloths, Renoir exclaimed, "Look at the perfection of her pelvis, her fine bosom. And what a *derrière*! Everybody can understand that!" His enthusiasm was so genuine that they all laughed.

They were animated by a rare *esprit de corps*. Dalou carried Auguste's tools, Renoir the "Mignon." Degas carried the lightest object, the

bronze mother and child. The sturdy Monet helped Auguste with the heavily loaded cart.

It was a benign May morning, and a holiday mood pervaded. Much of their route was uphill, along the boulevard du Montparnasse. Paris rattled by in *fiacres*, victorias, landaus, cabriolets, livery coaches, horse-drawn buses. Then the neighbourhood became worse and they passed peasants carrying chickens; old men in faded blue denim; unpainted houses with mansard roofs.



They reached the top of a hill, and Auguste could see Notre Dame in the distance, looking, as always, dramatic and beautiful. It was as if he were turning his back on the past.

It was wonderful to be moving to a new studio on this beautiful spring day, and Auguste felt young and happy again.

They were almost there when suddenly one of the wheels cracked on a broken cobble-stone and, weakened by the load, crumpled into a splinter of spokes. The cart careened out of Auguste's hands and crashed into a lamp-post. The "Bacchante" toppled on to the cobble-stones and smashed into many fragments.

Auguste stood stricken with horror. It was his most vital work.

Fantin tried to pick up the pieces, but it was useless. Dalou fingered the bent armature and announced, "It was this shoddy armature—it is hardly better than tin."

They all told Auguste how sorry they were as they said their *au revoirs*. Then the concierge came out on the pavement and swept up the fragments of clay. Auguste felt close to surrender.

Part III – The Travels

WITH THE death of the "Bacchante," Auguste resolved to devote all his energy to earning a better living. He consulted Lecoq about what kind of work he could get.

Lecoq said, "I can recommend you as an assistant to Carrier-Belleuse. His portrait busts of the great have made him enormously popular. He has far more work than he can do himself, so he employs assistants. He treats them like menials, but he pays well. I've recommended many artists to him. They come and they go. Most sculptors cannot endure being merely his executant and not signing their work. *Mon ami*, this is a serious step you are taking."

"Recommend me, *maître*? Please!"

Lecoq cautioned, "You will learn very little, get no credit, do the things I taught you to despise."

"But he pays well."

"Better than most." Lecoq sighed. "I hope you survive. You have such a solid foundation in sculpture, it would be a shame to see it crumble now." He had felt like a lighthouse for this young man, warning him against the hidden reefs and shoals. He said, "I will speak to him."

Carrier-Belleuse was a handsome middle-aged man with a florid complexion, full features and long wavy hair. He wore a flowing cravat, and a huge jewelled watch chain glistened on his stout stomach. He was the picture of an artist-gentleman. He greeted Auguste affably and put him to work at once. He had no time to waste on employees. He was the most popular sculptor of the Second Empire and was determined to carve a niche in society.

His sketches and designs were handed to the foreman, who handed them to Auguste, who then constructed the clay models in the style of Carrier-Belleuse. When Auguste's models were cast in bronze and marble, Carrier-Belleuse signed them and sold them immediately.

Because of the delicacy and skill Auguste had acquired as a *maître*

ornemaniste, he was assigned to model miniature nudes, for boudoir and drawing-room. The Carrier-Belleuse nudes were mannered, pretty, and without sex. Auguste hated them. But when he sought to give them individuality, the foreman destroyed them. Auguste, who had felt that he had looked upon the face of God while he was modelling the "Bacchante," now felt dull-witted and useless. But he was earning more money than he ever had before.

He and Rose moved to Montmartre, within walking distance of Carrier-Belleuse's studios. No longer did he visit his friends at the Café Guerbois or give his evenings and Sundays to his own sculpture. Rose was willing to pose, but the suggestion made him angry. He was twenty-seven; he would never have a chance to do his own work. When Rose said they should take *petit* Auguste back, he shouted "No!" On Sundays they visited the family and *petit* Auguste, and in good weather they went for walks. Auguste stayed away from the Louvre and the Luxembourg Gardens; they reminded him painfully that he was not even a *jeune maître*.

AFTER THREE years with Carrier-Belleuse, Auguste had grown heavier and broader in his chest and shoulders. The constant modelling had made his hands tremendously strong and facile. He could do the figures with his eyes shut. But he felt like a failure.

Then in 1870, Napoleon III, who had imperial ambitions and wanted to dominate Europe without taking the slightest risk, found himself enticed into a war he didn't want, that he doubted he could win, leading an army he didn't believe in. Yet almost everyone Auguste knew was positive that enlightened France would defeat barbaric Prussia. The country was relieved that Prussia at last would be put in her place.

Auguste was drafted into the *garde nationale*. He had visions of marching triumphantly on Berlin, but he was assigned to a reserve corps, and appointed corporal because he could read and write. Rose supported the family by sewing shirts for the soldiers.

Immediately Napoleon III learned that his doubts were justified. The war was in fact won by Germany in six weeks, when the Emperor was forced to capitulate at Sedan, though it was months before Paris fell. Occasionally, during the bitterly cold winter of 1870–1, Auguste's

regiment was moved, but never into action. Their commander was more concerned with keeping his unit intact in order to put down any disorders in Paris.

Auguste, worrying that his feet and his precious hands might freeze, was in graver danger from the cold than from the Germans. The cold began to affect his health, and the moment the armistice was signed he was invalided out of the *garde nationale.*

The Prussians had bombarded Paris and forced it to its knees by starving it. And when Germany took Alsace-Lorraine as spoils of war, every Frenchman felt he had been mutilated. It made Auguste, like most of his compatriots, far more hostile to Germany than he ever had been during the fighting.

He came home to find Mama ill from smallpox and starvation. Papa's eyesight had failed to a point where he could barely get about, and Aunt Thérèse was away trying to get one of her sons freed from a German prisoner-of-war camp. Rose was carrying the whole burden of the family. She told Auguste, "It is a miracle any of us are alive." But she was proud that she had scavenged enough food to keep the family going. "Cats, dogs, rats, roots, grass were a blessing. When I got a piece of horse meat, I considered myself very lucky."

"And my statues?" He had feared they were destroyed during the bombardment.

"Untouched. I wouldn't let anyone come near them. I kept them covered just as you taught me, *chéri.*"

He examined the sculpture. The cloths had been kept damp to prevent the clay from crumbling. She had dusted the few bronzes, and the studio was immaculate. With sudden emotion he drew her close and kissed her tenderly. But as usual he could not find words to compliment her.

When he saw Mama in her sick bed, tears came to his eyes. She was just skin and bones. And Papa, blinking back his tears, looked old, helpless and tired. Yet when Rose brought *petit* Auguste to the sick room, *Grand-père* and *Grand-mère* looked better. The child was the person of importance for them.

The next few days Auguste walked round Paris, looking for work, but there was none anywhere. Then Carrier-Belleuse, who had moved

his studio to neutral Belgium at the start of the war, offered him work in Brussels. Penniless, he accepted.

The morning he was to depart, Papa kissed him on both cheeks, and said, his voice trembling, "*Mon petit enfant*, don't stay long."

"No, Papa," said Auguste. "Just until I've saved some money."

Rose started to cry, but controlled herself when she saw Auguste frown. She said, "You will write, *chéri*?"

"I will write," he said.

Mama said, "All we can do is wait till you come home." Auguste had a feeling that he would never see her again.

Rose picked up the five-year-old *petit* Auguste and said, "Kiss your papa, *chéri*."

The boy did so, but Auguste felt the child recoil, and swung him in his arms. The child grinned and suddenly *grand* Auguste and *petit* Auguste embraced spontaneously for the first time.

At the door, Auguste felt a chill sweep through him. What more would they have to endure before he saw them again? Then he waved *au revoir*—he didn't trust his own voice—and strode off in the direction of the Gare St. Lazare.

In March civil war exploded in France as the Communards—groups of craftsmen, workers, clerks, shopkeepers—seized control of Paris. Enraged by the disastrous war with Germany, and the starvation that had followed, they hoped to repeat the triumphant revolution of 1793. Bloody street fighting raged between Communards and the Versailles army of Napoleon III.

The news that reached Brussels was horrifying. Auguste heard that the famine was even worse than during the German siege, and that all contact had been cut off between Paris and the rest of the world. He wrote frantic letters to Rose, and was terrified when there were no answers. There were rumours that Paris had been ravaged and gutted, and that the section where his family lived had become a vast grave. He was certain that they had been massacred. He wanted to rush back, but no one was being allowed into Paris.

Auguste had a simple room near his work. He was paid just enough to subsist on, and there was no money to send home. His employer,

considering Rodin experienced now, allowed him to model from his own sketches and designs, but his work had to remain in the style of Carrier-Belleuse. These clay models took on some of Rodin's vitality but they were always signed personally by Carrier-Belleuse before being sold to the bronzecaster, M. Picquant.

Auguste finally heard from Rose, by way of a smuggled letter written by Aunt Thérèse. But she didn't mention his sculpture, and he was certain that it had been destroyed. Rose told him: ". . . there is hardly any food, no money. They are burying the corpses in the fields because there is no more room in the cemeteries. We are still waiting for word from you. . . ."

He wrote Rose a frenzied letter pleading for news of his statues. She replied through Aunt Thérèse:

> Your statues are safe—I think we could devour them if they would nourish us. Forgive me for complaining, but Aunt Thérèse says you should know the truth. Mama is failing, we think from a lack of food. If you have any francs, *chéri*, they would help.

He was racked with despair. Next day he suddenly knew what he had to do. He took a hammer and chisel and with steady hands cut across the base of a female figure he had just finished modelling: CARRIER-BELLEUSE. If he was a forger, in a sense so was Carrier-Belleuse. His name was worthless, but Carrier-Belleuse's was not.

Auguste hid the nude, and that evening he took it to M. Picquant. Handling it, the fat, near-sighted caster, who had an infallible touch, looked at Auguste suspiciously. "This is a Carrier-Belleuse original?" he asked.

"Of course."

The caster slowly counted out seventy-five francs.

"*Merci*, monsieur." Auguste signed a receipt for the money.

A week later there was a long letter from Rose, thanking him for the francs. She had bought eggs and rabbits smuggled in from the country and had made a nourishing ragout, which Mama had liked. They could all kiss him. Mama was a little better, and if he could send a few more francs it would be wonderful.

He was deciding how to present another nude to the caster when he

was called into Carrier-Belleuse's office. Picquant was there with the piece to which Auguste had put his employer's name.

"Rodin, I could have you arrested for forgery!" Carrier-Belleuse cried. He waited for Auguste to abase himself but Auguste said nothing. And Carrier-Belleuse, realizing that a public trial would reveal that other artists did the work he signed, said, "Leave the premises immediately or I will call the police."

Auguste walked feverishly about Brussels the next couple of days, not knowing what to do, trying to eat on a franc a day. Rose wrote that Mama was worse, but he didn't have the money to go to Paris. He found that walking increased his appetite, so he sat in his room, brooding, crying out to himself: What has happened to me? What did I do wrong? Whom did I hurt?

He heard his door open and was surprised to see Joseph van Rasbourg, a fellow executant with Carrier-Belleuse. Van Rasbourg, a stocky, fair Dutchman, a little older than Auguste, had heard about the dismissal and thought it was a stroke of good fortune. He said, "I have been thinking of leaving Carrier-Belleuse for some time, and I'll need someone to help me."

"You want an assistant?" Auguste asked. He could be got cheap, he thought bitterly.

"A partner, *mon ami*. You have the strongest, quickest, best hands in the studio. I can get the orders. I'll sign all the work sold in Belgium and you will sign all the orders for France."

"And how much will I be paid?"

"Equally. We'll be partners."

"You know why I was fired?"

Van Rasbourg laughed. "I know. But who forged whose work?"

"I appreciate your feeling. But I would need money now."

"Most of my savings have gone into the rental of a studio, but I can advance you enough for room and board."

"But not enough to take me back to Paris?"

Van Rasbourg grew serious. "Gently, gently, Rodin; this is no way to start. We will sign a contract so no one will have to worry about being cheated. I may not be as good an artist as you are, but I am a better businessman. How much do you need?"

"It's not for me, it's for my family in Paris."

Van Rasbourg handed Auguste fifty francs, and Auguste murmured, "How can I thank you?" It would help Mama, even though he couldn't go to her.

HE WAS like a man who had been close to death only to be redeemed at the last moment. He sketched, designed and modelled. There were many orders, and although the designs were conventional the thrust and lunge and life of his figures were his own.

Van Rasbourg was as good as his word. They were partners, with their earnings split evenly. There was one irritant. Van Rasbourg was to sign all the work done for Belgium, Rodin all the work for France. But all the commissions came from Belgium. Since Auguste was more prolific than his partner there were soon many Rodin figures signed by Van Rasbourg. But at least the work was supporting him.

Then, at the end of 1871, Mama died. There was no money, and she was buried in an unmarked grave. Auguste felt desolate. Suddenly his loneliness was unbearable; he missed Rose beyond enduring.

He wrote to her, ordering her to join him. Aunt Thérèse could take care of *petit* Auguste and Papa, and he would send money for their support. But he was not sure Rose would come.

When she arrived at Brussels railway station on a cold February day in 1872, he was very pleased, but as usual he was unable to show it.

Rose, wearing black in mourning for Mama, asked him, "Has it been hard here, *chéri*?"

"Hard?" He picked up her luggage. "To be a sculptor is always hard. Did you have my work packed properly for shipping?"

"Yes. It should be here any day." Suddenly she threw her arms round him, crying, "You are glad to see me, *mon chéri*?"

He was annoyed. "I sent you your fare, didn't I?"

That evening was their first night of love in a year, and one of their most satisfying.

"Today," she murmured, "is the happiest day of my life. I worried so when we were apart."

"So did I." She had taken many risks for his work and he was grateful. In this she was a part of him and there was communication.

ON THE ADVICE of Van Rasbourg, he submitted "The Man with the Broken Nose" to the Brussels Salon of 1872. It was accepted—his first Salon acceptance—but it aroused no attention. He decided he should do large pieces, but what? A feeling of sadness pervaded him. He craved a change, almost any change. But where could a man go without money or time?

Van Rasbourg came upon him sitting by his model stand with his head in his hands. He asked, "What is wrong, Auguste?"

"I'm sick of what I am doing."

Van Rasbourg shrugged and said, "I don't like it, but I accept it." He looked round the studio almost with disgust: the half-finished clay statuettes, many of them reminiscent of Carrier-Belleuse; the Roman-style portrait busts, the ornamental cherubs.

"At least you have some recognition. But no one knows Rodin the sculptor. Whatever we sell is signed Van Rasbourg. I cannot go on this way!"

Van Rasbourg considered himself a fair man. There was a far greater demand for Rodin's work than for his own. But he did not want to give in. He said, "You need a holiday. You should visit Amsterdam, look at the Rembrandts."

"Oh, you are generous indeed! Just as you were when you calculated that you would sell far more in Belgium than in France."

"It's not my fault that France doesn't buy. You are tired, Auguste. You need a rest. For my sake, *mon ami*, go before we have a quarrel. Take a week." Van Rasbourg reached into his pocket and handed Auguste a hundred francs. "A going-away present."

That night Auguste told Rose that he would visit Holland for a few days "on business." With difficulty she kept from crying. Chilled, tense, shaking inwardly with unhappiness, she tried to warm herself by clasping him close. But he did not respond; he was thinking of his trip.

THE MOMENT Auguste arrived in Amsterdam he went straight to the Rijks-museum and paced slowly through galleries with the finest Rembrandts he had ever seen. In Rembrandt there was no sentimentality. His blacks were more than a colour, they were a dimension, a depth. Rembrandt's world was not breathtakingly beautiful; often it

was ugly. But Rembrandt's faces drew Auguste back, day after day.

The world Rembrandt lived in had humiliated him, declared him a bankrupt, a failure, but he had continued to paint. As Degas once said, "We are artists, if we are, because we can't be anything else." And Rembrandt had not evaded the issue of man's tragic struggle with fate. He had shown the decay of life, the inevitability of death and dissolution—the dissolution often before the death. Finally the painter had come to care only for the inner self of his subjects, and so had concentrated on faces, faces that often emerged out of darkness with just a glimmer of light.

Auguste did many sketches. He was bursting with ideas and for the first time for years he had an overwhelming desire to plunge into new work. In the days that followed he studied the work of Rubens and Hals and Vermeer and Brueghel, and visited Rembrandt's house in the old Jewish quarter. It was two weeks before he returned to Brussels.

VAN RASBOURG did not criticize Auguste's prolonged absence, and Rose greeted him tenderly. Auguste, refreshed and stimulated, treated her with a new gentleness. For the next few weeks he worked hard, doing heads mostly, modelling a number at the same time; but the concept of the major figure he longed to model still eluded him. Finally, restless again, he told Van Rasbourg that he must go to Italy to see Michelangelo's sculpture.

Van Rasbourg grumbled, but he knew there was no changing Auguste's mind once it was made up. He agreed and even paid Auguste an advance, to show that his heart was in the right place.

Rose was stricken by the news. Italy was far away, he would be gone for months. "How will I manage, *chéri*?" she asked. "I won't have enough money to pay the grocer. How do you know that by the time you return I won't have been put out in the street with everything we own?"

"Haven't you any money?" he asked, surprised. He had given her some several weeks ago.

"A few francs."

He handed her fifty francs, although it reduced his margin of safety, and Rose accepted the money with a mumbled "*Merci*." She was

deeply resentful that he was not including her on the trip to Italy, and started to cry.

He almost exploded in a fury; then, remembering that she was the only one he could trust with his work, he dried her eyes and said, "Come, *ma chatte*, it is not that bad. I will write to you often."

When he had gone, she burst into tears again. She could not get accustomed to being treated as part housekeeper, part mistress. Often she had resolved to leave him if he would not marry her, yet ten years had passed and she was no closer to marriage than when they had met. She was disgusted with herself because of her inability to refuse him. One of these days, she swore to herself, she would leave him—as soon as she had enough money saved. She dried her eyes, and added his fifty francs to her hoard. Auguste was absent-minded and never remembered how much he gave her. By the time he returned, if God were good and she were able to obtain work sewing, she should have enough to return to Paris, without him if necessary.

LA BELLA ITALIA was cold, with fog and rain, and Auguste found none of the "golden light" he had heard so much about. On the train to Florence, he met an Italian, Salvatore Santoni, a tall striking youth whom he would have liked to model. Later, in Florence, Santoni introduced Auguste to a Vittorio Peppino who had, Auguste thought, the most expressive body he had ever seen. He told Peppino and Santoni that he was a sculptor. If they ever came to Paris—he was already planning to return there—he would like to model them. He gave them his father's address.

Now Auguste went off to the Uffizi, to the Pitti Palace, to all the great art galleries of Florence, and though he admired Tintoretto, Raphael, Titian, Rubens, Botticelli, he grew exhausted with Madonnas and saints. Fearing further disillusionment, he went to the Accademia di Belle Arti, and suddenly the original of Michelangelo's "David" loomed ahead of him. He had a sense of sheer physical delight as he viewed the figure; it was like a great anatomy lesson.

During the next week Auguste exposed himself to everything he could find of Michelangelo. He was fascinated by the four unfinished captives. He loved the rough quality of the sculpture more than the

purity of the finished marbles; it was as if the flesh had retained Michelangelo's finger-prints, as if he had released the figures from the stone in which they had been slumbering.

He left Florence to see the Rome of Michelangelo. When he found the Sistine Chapel, it was crowded with hordes of tourists, priests and chattering children. His neck ached as he strained to see the paintings, and he was shocked by the mixture of styles. He was about to stalk out when he saw several people lying down on the floor to look up at Michelangelo's ceiling. If Michelangelo had painted on his back, his work should be viewed thus. He too stretched out on the floor and looked upward. The painting was natural now—how vital a thing was perspective!

He lay there and smiled to himself: how minutely Michelangelo had studied the position of the muscles and the veins! There seemed to be no posture, no movement which he had found too difficult to draw. He had created this universe like a god. In his own way he had forced order out of his own chaos. No wonder much of his work was unfinished; he was always striving to master the world, to impose his own vision on it. "The Last Judgment" was Michelangelo's Judgment. "The Creation of Adam" was *his* Creation of Adam. If there was a divine hand touching life into Adam, it was the artist's own hand.

Excitedly Auguste rose to his feet. He had to get to his own sculpture. Before leaving Rome he made a special point of seeing the "Moses," which he found the most satisfying of all the great Florentine's work. Then, driven by a force even more irresistible than the one that had propelled him to Italy, he arranged to return to Belgium and his studio as quickly as possible.

EIGHTEEN MONTHS later Auguste stood in the studio he had rented in the rue du Bourgmestre in Brussels. He stared at his clay figure, then at the living model. He had laboured on this nude—he called it "The Vanquished"—ever since his return from Italy. It was almost completed. The life-size statue of the slim, sensitive youth stood in a gesture of anguish, his right hand clutching his head in pain, while his other hand was braced tensely upon a staff.

"You can sit," he said to the model, Auguste Neyt. The boyish Neyt, a soldier, sat down, throwing an old blanket round him.

After many weeks Auguste had taught Neyt to be natural, to stand or to stroll about, relaxed and graceful. Neyt, who knew nothing about art, had been offended by the request to pose in the nude, which seemed to him vulgar and unmasculine. An offer of ten francs an hour had changed his mind. But the rate had been reduced steadily as his hours had increased. Now the sculptor owed him for many months. But Neyt was fascinated by this replica of himself.

This Sunday it seemed they had been working for ever. It was growing dark, and he would be late meeting his fiancée. He asked, "Will it be done tomorrow?"

Auguste shrugged. It would be done when it was done. By now he knew the calendar only by the days he was able to work on "The Vanquished." Now the figure was almost alive.

"Who is that outside?" Neyt asked as he heard footsteps.

"My housekeeper." Auguste could imagine Rose glaring at the studio door with anger and hatred. He had forbidden her to enter when Neyt was posing. The statue was a secret he had kept from her, and it made her feel like an alien in her own home. But she was afraid to disobey him and enter.

Neyt said, "We will be going on field manoeuvres soon."

"Will you be quiet! Keep your hands the way they are."

Auguste modelled swiftly and surely, and the clay responded to his touch as if it were alive. He made a final hollow at the neck and on the shoulder where the body, even as it was most muscular and masculine, was most vulnerable. This figure would not have the heroic power of the "David," but it would be a *man—every* man who had stood up to defeat in war.

Neyt took a close look at the finished figure, his eyes widening with amazement. "It's the most life-like statue I've ever seen. I'll be afraid to walk the streets of Brussels after you exhibit it. Everybody will recognize me."

"Good. We will put it in bronze. You can dress now."

Neyt took a last look at "The Vanquished." "He is so naked; something scandalous is going to happen. I can feel it."

Disturbed by the model's doubts, Auguste asked Van Rasbourg to view the finished figure and invited Rose also. They stood in the doorway of the studio, paralysed by surprise. Rose was very shocked. She exclaimed, "So realistic!"

Auguste said irritably, "The anatomy is sound."

There was a strange look in Van Rasbourg's eyes. He said, "Madame Rose may be right, Auguste. People may be offended."

"It is no more realistic than the 'David'," said Auguste.

"We think of the 'David' as a hero, larger than life. 'The Vanquished' is a breathing, living man."

"You mean it would have been better to make him heroic?"

"Possibly. But it is a beautiful figure. The modelling is so plastic you want to stroke it."

"Do you think the Brussels Salon will accept it?"

"We can try. I have influential friends. But I'm cutting my own throat. If this statue is a success, you will become a full-time sculptor."

"No one will like it," Auguste said, suddenly pessimistic. "They'll say I'm not academic enough."

Van Rasbourg stared once more at the slender figure with its arms uplifted in anguished protest, the torso and legs smooth and graceful.

"If this were a Venus," he said, "it would be accepted as a classical figure. But a male? However, we will do what we can."

Auguste asked, "Is there anything you don't like?"

"The staff he is holding—it's unnecessary. It weakens him."

"I don't want him to be a superman, like Michelangelo's men."

Auguste had striven for the opposite extreme from Michelangelo, resolved not to model a hero—a Hercules or a Prometheus—but to let the model's natural, unrestrained movements create the idea of the figure.

"Supermen don't suffer the way this man does. But I would remove the staff."

Rodin said, looking like granite, "I'll see."

"Which means you won't," said Van Rasbourg.

Rose scolded, "That's not nice. You ask Monsieur van Rasbourg for his opinion and then you disregard it."

Van Rasbourg said with a smile, "I made my contribution. I

approved. That is all Auguste really desired. You are using a new language of sculpture here. They will regard you as a heretic. Auguste, I will advance the money for the casting."

"The Vanquished" was accepted by the Brussels Salon. Auguste went to the exhibition at the Cercle Artistique with Van Rasbourg and Rose. They searched and searched and finally, in the last, back room of the exhibition, they found "The Vanquished." It was placed in a dark corner, where it could be viewed only from the front. But it was creating a commotion. A crowd was clustered before it, laughing and sneering. There was a sign hanging on it with the derisive comment: "Cast on the flesh of the model."

"It's true," he heard a spectator exclaim. "It is so life-like it must have been modelled on a body—a corpse, no doubt!"

Auguste felt damned, bankrupt. He raised his hands hopelessly. But Rose pushed through the crowd and tore the sign into pieces. Then with her old proud, upright carriage she strode back to Auguste. He took her hand and walked out with her and Van Rasbourg, who said, "There will be favourable opinions, too."

But the vilification of the statue spread to the Brussels newspapers. Auguste wrote to them that the figure had not been cast from life, but the more he protested, the more he was accused

When the exhibition closed, and "The Vanquished" was back in his studio, he picked up an iron bar to smash it. Rose was standing in the doorway with Van Rasbourg, who stepped in front of Auguste and cried, "You're not killing the critics, you're killing yourself! Give me the bar, Auguste."

"I can't even walk the streets without being laughed at."

"Then fight back. I'd rename it 'The Age of Bronze.' And doesn't the staff weaken him? The stress should be on the figure."

"The Age of Bronze," reflected Auguste. He visualized the figure standing alone, without the staff. It would be a more lyrical mood. He smiled for the first time for weeks, and took away the staff without another word.

Van Rasbourg was pleased. He said, "Feel better?"

Auguste said, "I'd feel better if the Paris Salon would accept this. It would be a vindication."

"You will need influence for that," said Van Rasbourg, "and it will mean the end of our partnership."

"I'm sorry, Joseph, but I have to make the plunge. I'll never forgive myself if I don't."

"And five minutes ago you wanted to destroy this figure. I have no objection to dissolving our partnership, but at the moment I can't give you much cash, Auguste."

Rose asked, "Will this mean a return to Paris for good?"

"Yes. Only there is no money."

Van Rasbourg said, "It is a fine statue, Auguste." He wished him luck, and left.

"Could you return to Paris if you had a thousand francs?" Rose asked.

"Where could I get that much money?"

"If you had it, would you take me with you?"

"Yes! But you are talking nonsense."

Rose walked to her wardrobe, picked up an old bag and placed it in Auguste's hand. His eyes bulged as he saw the money in it: dirty coins, soggy bank-notes pinned together, forty *sou* pieces, ancient *louis d'or*. Given with her love, he thought with a pang of remorse. Then he was irate.

"Where did you get this?"

"I sew when you are away, and I save."

"I haven't been away for over a year."

"*Chéri*, you are always away when you are modelling. There are nearly a thousand francs here. I've been saving ever since I came to Brussels, almost six years."

He was ashamed, but couldn't say he was sorry for his rudeness. He shook his head.

"Rosette, I'll never understand you."

"We will move back to Paris?"

"As soon as possible."

Suddenly he gave her back the money. "It is years of your life and I've given you so little."

Rose chuckled and said with peasant sagacity, "It's more becoming, Auguste, when you are stern."

They smiled at each other wistfully. She put the money back into his hands. His fine, powerful, beautiful hands, she thought. He kissed her and held her as if he would never let her go, and she thought how dearly she loved him.

Suddenly he frowned. "Do you always have to wear black and grey? You know I like bright colours." With an air of sacrifice he handed her fifty francs of her own money. Then, with lavish generosity, he added fifty more.

"Get a new dress or two."

"And a parasol? I've always wanted a parasol, Auguste."

He smiled indulgently. "If it will make you happy." Then he said wonderingly, "The things you could have done with this money!"



THE AGE OF BRONZE

Part IV – The Return

THE DAY Auguste returned to Paris he stood on the top of the Arc de Triomphe and knew he was home. The city spread out before him, the familiar sights he loved: Notre Dame, the Louvre, the Seine, Les Invalides. It was a fine winter day, crisp and clear. He strode down the Champs-Élysées, past the fashionable women in enormous feathered hats, the gentlemen wearing top-hats and frock-coats, and came at last to the spot where the Vendôme Column had been wrecked during the ferocious civil war. The palace of the Tuileries had been destroyed too, but the Louvre, although it had been damaged, appeared as solid as ever. Coming to the Seine, he paused and looked across at the Palais de l'Industrie, home of the Salon. And with a sudden feeling of despair he thought they would not accept his "Age of Bronze."

Auguste's family lived near by, with Aunt Thérèse, in the rue Dauphine. All at once he was nervous, almost afraid to meet *petit* Auguste. The child was eleven now. Would he resent his father's long absence? He told himself this was nonsense. He was a sculptor, not a husband or a papa. Yet his nervousness increased as he approached the small stone house. He knocked, and Aunt Thérèse let him in. She came into his arms without surprise.

"Come," she said, "Papa is waiting."

She was thinner and walked stiffly now, like an old woman, but her eyes were as bright and lively as ever. He followed her into the kitchen, where Papa sat at the head of the table as in the old days. Papa's chin whiskers had become yellowish and straggly. His heavy features were pinched. He was bent, his broad shoulders and muscular chest and arms were shrunken like clay under which the armature has collapsed. His sharp blue eyes saw nothing now, yet they said: Why did you stay away so long? Papa reached awkwardly to kiss him on the cheeks, and Auguste leaned forward.

Papa said, "That's a fine beard you have, Auguste."

"*Merci*, Papa. Like yours."

"You are staying at home for good?"

"Yes. I must find a house for all of us, and send for Rose."

Then Auguste's heart pounded. A youngster stood before him. How *petit* Auguste had grown! Although his features resemble Rose's, his colouring is mine, Auguste thought, and he has my hands, square, with thick, stubby fingers. Perhaps he has some artistic ability, he thought in a flash of hope. *Petit* Auguste raised his face dutifully and Auguste picked up the boy and embraced him. Tickled by his father's beard, the child began to giggle. Auguste laughed too.

"Mon Dieu!" cried Papa. "He hasn't laughed for a long time."

"We must go for a picnic," said Auguste. "Where would you like to go, little one?"

"The Bois de Boulogne," the child suggested. "Can we take a big yellow omnibus? With two horses?"

They not only went in the omnibus but Auguste hailed a carriage when it was time to go home.

As they went into the house, Papa asked, "What is this statue you are showing in Paris?"

"A naked man. Life size."

"But not a Jesus?"

"Not even a saint. But what does it matter? I'm getting on for thirty-seven. It's too late for success."

"After all the time you've spent at it." But Papa wore a big smile. Aunt Thérèse had a special dinner, with bouillabaisse, a roast, potatoes, and Cointreau.

"Like old times," said Papa.

AUGUSTE heard, unofficially, that the jury of the Salon were divided over accepting his "Age of Bronze." He decided to seek the advice and help of his artist friends and learned that they were meeting now at the Café Nouvelle Athènes on the place Pigalle.

This café was small and unpretentious, but garishly painted inside. The *chef-d'œuvre* was a picture of a huge rat. There was sand on the floor, and a high partition separated the bistro from the restaurant. The husky proprietor greeted the stocky, red-bearded man standing in the doorway, and Auguste asked for M. Degas.

"Ah, the painter. There." The proprietor indicated a group of men sitting round two tables in the corner, under a cloud of blue tobacco smoke. Auguste felt self-conscious as he approached his friends. Would they regard him as an interloper now?

He saw Degas in his usual pepper-and-salt suit, nibbling almonds and raisins which he didn't offer to anyone else. Manet was as attractive and distinguished as ever, but looked older. Renoir had the same ragged red beard, and Fantin, with his vandyke more carefully cultivated, looked sad. Monet had grown heavier and more solemn. There were several others whom Auguste did not recognize.

They were arguing vehemently. They greeted him briefly and the discussion rushed on. Their complaints sounded the same as before and it was difficult to believe that years had passed.

Fantin introduced Auguste to Camille Pissarro, a middle-aged painter with a long white beard who looked like a biblical prophet.

Degas was attacking Monet. "We make an enormous emotional investment in our own show and then you back out!"

"Back out?" said Manet. "I never said I would exhibit."

Degas said sharply, "But you will exhibit in the Salon."

"So will I," ventured Auguste. "If they accept me. Where else?"

Degas said, "In our own exhibition."

"The Exposition des Impressionnistes—our third! This April," Fantin explained. "It is in direct opposition to the Salon, and now the Salon and the Academy are determined to ruin us."

"Rodin, why don't you exhibit with us?" Monet asked.

Auguste wavered. But as the only sculptor, he would be too exposed. He said, "I've already entered 'The Age of Bronze' for the Salon."

Degas said, "Then you'll get what you deserve."

"Will there be anything good at the Salon?" Rodin asked.

Degas said, "Manet, perhaps."

Manet said, "Now, let's not be patronizing, Degas."

Auguste was filled with foreboding. No one had asked him about his work. They were cold and indifferent. But as he stood up and said "*Bonsoir*," Fantin advised him, "Make sure they place your figure properly," and Renoir added, "So the body is not in shadow." Degas said, "If it is a catastrophe, remember we warned you."

"THE AGE OF BRONZE" was accepted by the Salon a few days later. The goal for which Auguste had yearned was reached. But again his statue was placed in a small, dark room at the back, and no one paid any attention to it. And it stood so high, so out of proportion, its total nakedness overwhelming!

Large crowds formed before a bronze and marble bust submitted by Sarah Bernhardt. But the biggest crowds stood in front of a Napoleonic battle scene by Meissonier, several yards wide and a yard high. And the inevitable Bouguereau, a panel of classic nudes, was considered the masterpiece of the show. Poor "Age of Bronze!"

Then a Paris newspaper repeated the Brussels charges that the figure was cast from life and called it "vulgar, wanton, obscene."

The next day Auguste was almost crushed by the mob about his statue. There were boos, sneers, cries of contempt. And the day after that, the crush was almost impossible. People came to the exhibition just to see this immoral figure. Auguste had yearned to achieve recognition and he had gained notoriety. Now Rodin was *un fourbe*—a fake. The jury of the Salon, embarrassed by the *succès de scandale*, ordered "The Age of Bronze" to be removed.

Rodin scurried about Paris, searching for a studio to house it, and found nothing. None of his artist friends could help; they were reeling under savage attacks against their own exhibition. The attendants were preparing to remove the figure when suddenly Auguste saw Lecoq standing before it. He was slim and erect, although he leaned on a stout cane, and his hair had turned white. He said to Auguste, "You may store the figure in my studio, if you like. At least you've made a stir—that's what counts today."

"What do you think, *maître*?"

"There is something new in your work."

"Obscenity."

Lecoq laughed. "You have a boldness and firmness here that is refreshing. This isn't just stone; it is a passionate and emotional man, a living being."

"Whom should I protest to about its removal?"

"By law you should complain to the Ministry of Fine Arts, but the real power is Eugène Guillaume. He is the head of the Beaux Arts, and

a leading member of the Institute and the Académie Française. He devotes himself to the extermination of heresy."

"And I'm a heretic. What is the use of protesting?"

"It will attract more attention. Well, *mon ami*, do you want to use my studio?" Auguste tried to find words to thank him, but Lecoq was ordering the men moving "The Age of Bronze" to be careful. "*Mon Dieu!* Don't you know a work of art when you see it?"

Lecoq invited Auguste to meet some artists at his studio one Sunday. They were Stéphane Mallarmé, the symbolist poet, a man with fine, sensitive features; Eugène Carrière, the painter, who had a large head dominated by a broad brow and a thick, drooping moustache; and Alfred Boucher, the sculptor, sharp-featured and handsome, very much the *grand seigneur*, yet full of charm.

Lecoq said, "They are a committee for 'The Age of Bronze.' "

"Committee?" Auguste was irritated. His protest to the Institute had involved him in endless trouble. He had had to produce casts and photographs of his model, and still he had not had satisfaction.

Carrière said, "We all admire 'The Age of Bronze.' We think the Institute has been unfair."

Boucher said, "Rodin, don't be offended, but if you could model something for the jury of the Salon while they watch, then you could disprove the charge made by the press that you cast from life."

Auguste exclaimed, "I'm not a student. It's unfair."

"We know," said Boucher. "But it's more unfair to allow this calumny to stand."

"I will do what Maître Lecoq advises."

Lecoq said, "If I were you, I'd thank heaven for the chance."

AUGUSTE was waiting when the jury of five sculptors arrived. One of them was Boucher. Eugène Guillaume, the chairman, was a wiry man with a long nose, a sharp chin. "Let us not waste time with recriminations," he said. "Whenever you are ready, Rodin, we are."

"*Merci*, monsieur. What kind of figure do you want?"

"Whatever you like. We do not expect a *chef-d'œuvre*."

"Why not?" said Auguste. "I spent eighteen months on 'The Age of Bronze.' Why shouldn't I do a masterpiece in an hour?"

Guillaume flushed. Boucher motioned for Auguste to begin.

For the first time in years Auguste was improvising. He remembered the Italian, Peppino, with his magnificent, exciting stride, and he began to model him. He mounted the torso on the armature and as the figure became real he felt in the presence of God.

Boucher marvelled at the ease with which Rodin worked, the structure of this figure welling up from his imagination. He worked quietly, swiftly, dominating his material.

Auguste had forgotten their presence. He accentuated the hips—the devil with being correct, timid. He wanted to do something different. Gone was the emptiness, the feeling of betrayal. He brought one leg forward, and stressed the stomach muscles, which altered with the movement of the leg. He lost track of time, working in a fury now. When he finished the body and legs he halted. Several hours had passed, but he merely had a sense of physical delight, and felt in a state of grace.

Guillaume protested, "Without a head—and no arms? Is this figure finished?"

"As an improvisation, yes," said Auguste. "As a completed work, obviously not. No decent work is done in one sitting."

Guillaume said, "You have an obsession with the naked body."

Auguste said, "The heart of art comes from the human body. Bernini used the male body for the door of a palace. Michelangelo painted the human body all over the Sistine Chapel. There is the work of Titian, Rubens, Botticelli. Monsieur, have you seen their paintings?"

Guillaume was affronted, but Boucher, viewing the figure, thought: This is a real man, quick with life, with movement, with rough truth. "Rodin's technical skill is so obvious it is foolish to question it."

Guillaume said, "He can improvise. But the figure has no repose."

Auguste retorted, "There is no such thing as repose in Nature, not even in death. Even the decomposition of the dead body is a form of motion. Everything in existence is in motion, the universe, Nature, ourselves. Even when we sleep our hearts beat, our blood moves, our minds roam far and wide."

Guillaume asked, "What do you call this figure?"

"'The Man That Walks.' Now—what about the charges against 'The Age of Bronze?' Did I cast this from life?"

Guillaume replied, "We never accused you of that. It was the press. And you have disproved the charge. 'The Age of Bronze' will be shown again. If there is no agitation the State may buy it."

Auguste asked, "Then why did you attack me?"

"We did not attack you. But you make your nudes so life-like they stir erotic fantasies. If you had done a family scene or a patriotic subject or"—Guillaume's eyes lit up—"why don't you do a saint?"

"I will. When I have reason to," Auguste said curtly.

The jurors walked out, except Boucher, who shook Auguste's hand and said, "I knew you would vindicate yourself."

After Boucher left, Rodin stared at his figure, which he thought of as "The Man That Walks." He thought: You alone, Monsieur Clay, make me real. Nothing else proves anything. He did not feel vindicated; he merely felt exhausted. Yet there was something to Guillaume's suggestion to do a saint.

HE SUMMONED Rose from Brussels and they moved into a small apartment on the rue St. Jacques with Papa and *petit* Auguste. Aunt Thérèse went to live with one of her sons. August also rented a shed on the rue Fourneaux as a studio. He had decided to take the plunge, to be a full-time sculptor as long as his money lasted. He had saved half of Rose's money, and Van Rasbourg had given him a thousand-franc loan on his share of the business in Brussels.

The afternoon he went to Lecoq's studio to move "The Age of Bronze" and "The Man That Walks," he found Boucher there with Lecoq. Boucher exclaimed excitedly, "I have wonderful news, Rodin. Guillaume has promised me that your next piece will be admitted to the Salon without question. 'The Age of Bronze' also."

"When?" asked Auguste. This was the main issue, he thought.

"Two years, three years, I would presume," said Boucher. "When Guillaume thinks it will not create a commotion."

Auguste said stubbornly, "I want acceptance now."

But Boucher persisted, "When will your next piece be done?"

"I haven't begun a new piece."

Boucher sighed. "That's too bad. This is the time to strike. What about 'The Man That Walks?' You've virtually finished it."

"No," said Auguste. "The shoulders are too frail, and I must make the legs more muscular. It's just a working model."

"It's an interesting figure," said Lecoq. At seventy-five, having retired from the Petite École, he was determined to reduce the work of the Beaux Arts sculptors—Boucher excluded—to a heap of rubble, and Rodin was the man to do it. "With a little more work, Rodin, it would be ready."

But Auguste refused to be moved. "A figure must grow like a tree, slowly." He pointed to "The Age of Bronze" with a passionate gesture. "What's the use of doing something else for the Salon if they don't admit what I've done best? I give all that I am to this work and you want me to invest in tomorrow. In three years I'll be forty, and who knows how much sculpture I'll have left in me?"

Boucher was shaken by Rodin's emotion, but he said, "One does not bargain with Guillaume. You are an uncomfortable man, Rodin, but are you going to keep working, whatever happens?"

"I will try," Auguste answered grimly.

He went to his studio every day at sunrise and stayed until sunset, but nothing happened. The constant battling had stifled his emotion. He was full of doubt, without faith. His savings were diminishing rapidly and he was close to despair.

Coming home to the apartment quite late one night, he found Rose waiting for him in the parlour. Before he could even sit down, she said, "You must do something about *petit* Auguste."

"Later. Where's dinner?"

"Wait," she said with unexpected firmness, and put aside the sculptor's smock, which she had been mending. "The boy is not doing well at school. He goes regularly to the Little Sisters of the Poor, but I can't make him work, but you could if you would take a little time."

"What about Papa? Can't he punish him?"

"Papa spoils him. And he doesn't need punishment, he needs attention from you. *Chéri*, you must devote some time to him."

Auguste said tartly, "I have to earn a living."

"He had such a wonderful time the day you came home," she said sadly. "He still talks about it."

"I enjoyed it, too. But, *ma chatte*, I don't have time now."

"Not even one day a week? For your own son?"

Auguste was silent. He felt a sudden bitterness, so harsh it shocked him. He didn't want to feel this way, but to accept *petit* Auguste completely was to make the final commitment.

"Auguste, why do you hate the child?" Rose asked suddenly.

"Hate him?" Auguste was startled. "I don't hate him."

"Then resent him. You do, you know. Yes, you do."

"That's absurd. I want him to grow up a fine boy."

"But without your help!" Rose jumped to her feet, rushed into their bedroom and slammed the door.

This was the time to walk out, he told himself; it was ridiculous to endure any more. Yet at the thought of going on without Rose he felt suddenly weak. How attractive she had looked when she had stormed out: her skin flaming, her head held high like a Venus. He went to the bedroom door, pushed it open and saw her crying. Then he was by her side, soothing her. He whispered, "I have a brilliant idea for *petit* Auguste. I'll teach him to draw. He will become an artist."

"How do you know he will like to draw?"

"He will like it. I will teach him."

She kissed his fingers, caressed his beard. "*Chéri*, he is your son."

PETIT AUGUSTE was excited by the prospect of seeing the studio. It had been forbidden him up to now, and he was sure it was a wonderful place. Also he loved having his father pay some attention to him, which he rarely did. The Sunday he was to go there, he only nibbled at his breakfast. He jumped up, and he and his father started off.

But when Rodin proudly opened the door of the studio, *petit* Auguste wanted to cry. He had expected something magnificent, like the Louvre; there was nothing grand here; only two straight-backed chairs, a model's stand, masses of clay, plaster and terracotta, and a fire-place.

But when his father began to work, using him as a model for a mother-and-child group, the boy felt his love. Rodin was breathing with a strange intensity; the clay became firm in his strong hands, and as the figures took shape, looking like him and Mama, the boy was delighted. "Can I try?" he cried.

"Certainly." Auguste was deeply pleased.

Petit Auguste was clumsy with the clay, and Auguste grew impatient. It was a mistake, he thought, to rush the child. He gave him paper, pencils and crayons.

"What shall I draw?" *Petit* Auguste looked bewildered.

"Anything. Whatever you imagine."

But the child couldn't imagine anything. He sat there, on the verge of tears, his father standing over him, foreboding, gigantic. He started to draw Rodin; the boy had facility, and his father sighed with relief and said, "You have a steady hand."

The child worked hard the rest of the day, drawing one head of his father after another. His father talked about art. When they left the studio the boy felt as if he were stepping out of a jail. But his father, pleased with his drawings, was unusually affectionate.

Auguste's affectionate mood lasted until he assigned various chores to *petit* Auguste. The boy came to the studio after school and at weekends. He was supposed to keep the clay moist, to make sure that the tools were within reach, to keep the floor clean and the fire going. In return, Auguste would teach the boy to paint, model and draw.

Within a few weeks *petit* Auguste could draw accurately, but never freely or imaginatively. Painting and modelling bored him. He was a heavy, stocky boy with a round, soft, rosy face; but his childish charm had gone. A weaker version of Rose, reflected Auguste, without her strength or carriage. The boy disliked his chores, and evaded them.

Auguste came home one night and said to Rose, freezingly, "The boy has been using my clay to make balls to throw at the boys in the street."

Rose said, "He's restless. Be patient with him."

"Patient? He won't work unless I'm at him every moment!"

Rose glanced at Auguste with sudden anger. She thought: I show my age, my hair is turning grey. I have to take care of *his* papa, *his* child, *his* wants. *Mon Dieu!* I'm not a saint, I wish someone would look after *me*. But he will never appreciate me unless I leave him.

Auguste annoyed said, "He takes after you—he thinks only of himself."

"He needs someone to play with. You've said nothing about *petit* Auguste's wants. Maybe he should do nothing."

"Only day-dream?"

"Didn't you, *chéri*? You told me that you were very bad at school."

"But I would do anything to draw and paint and model."

"Give him time—he's not yet twelve. You didn't go to the Petite École until you were fourteen. Maybe he should go to that school."

"If I can't teach him, how can strangers?" Tears came to his eyes and he cried out in anguish, "The child doesn't care for art! You'll have to help in the studio, and watch him."

She agreed to do what she could.

SUMMER came, and Auguste was still unable to find a suitable subject. One day he had lunch with Boucher, who said, "There are several sculpture competitions under way now. Why don't you enter one?"

"I don't like competitions."

"Who does? But if you won one, you wouldn't need the Salon. The Third Republic is planning a competition for a memorial to the national defence of Paris against the Germans."

"As Guillaume suggested—a patriotic subject."

But Auguste entered the competition. He modelled Paris as courageous, defiant, a girl from Lorraine like Rose, a kind of Joan of Arc.

Enthralled by this subject, Rose posed gaily, triumphantly. She lost her worn look, was pretty, eager, resolute again, loving to be needed and wanted. Auguste didn't want her to look happy. He prodded her into an argument over *petit* Auguste. Now Rose, defending her son like a tigress, glared ferociously. Just the expression he wanted.

When he finished a terracotta helmeted bust of her—"Bellona," he called it—he decided it was too small for a monument. He used this head as the apex of two heroic figures, with the dominant figure a new Goddess of War rising defiantly above a writhing soldier. He named this monument "La Défense" and sent it hopefully to the contest. It was eliminated in the first round.

It had been a bad year. At the end of it he had so little money left that when Carrier-Belleuse offered him a job in the National Manufactory of Porcelain at Sèvres, with the proviso that he would be allowed time for his own work, he accepted. Carrier-Belleuse was now art director of this world-famous manufactory of porcelain vases. Auguste

was surprised by the ageing sculptor's friendliness. "You will do well with us," he said. "And you mustn't be impatient about your own work. Your time will come."

Auguste was almost forty, yet he still had not achieved recognition. He had so much serious work to do. He would model Sèvres vases, yes—that was a necessity. But as long as he lived, he must continue with his sculpture. Art, he whispered to himself, *la belle dame sans merci.*

DESPERATE for a model, Auguste wrote to Peppino in Florence. Several months later the young man stood at his studio door. He said he was coming to Paris anyway, and thought it would be amusing to pose for the *maître.*

Auguste told him that he would take him on.

"One hour in this studio——" Peppino remarked, "*Basta!* A man could freeze to death! And what about money?"

Auguste said, "I will get another stove." He handed Peppino ten francs and told him to return tomorrow. He wondered if the advance was a mistake, if he had seen the last of him.

To his surprise, the graceful Florentine returned the next morning. He was taken aback when Rodin ordered him to disrobe, and stepped on to the model's stand as if it were a gallows. His body was superb, long-legged, thin-waisted, neither too muscular nor too thin. "Move! Move!" Auguste shouted. Peppino paced up and down, disappointed. He had expected to pose with his arms flung out like a Garibaldi. "What about money?" he inquired.

"I'll give you ten francs every day you pose. More when we work late. Walk about—that will keep you warm."

Peppino strode up and down the studio until he was exhausted, while Auguste made many drawings, capturing an enormous variety of movements. Finally Peppino held out his hand imploringly and said, "I am tired. If I am to work this hard, it is worth more than ten francs."

Auguste said, "Peppino, you are going to be a masterpiece. We must both be patient." He agreed to give him fifteen francs a day.

He arranged to be at Sèvres only three days a week, and ordered Rose to bring his meals to him when he was working in the studio. When she said she could not serve him and Papa who was ailing and *petit*

Auguste who was becoming unmanageable, his jaw stiffened. She must manage, he told her.

Auguste spent every hour he could in his chilly studio—the new stove had made very little difference. With such a model, he said to himself, I am a sculptor. He became as isolated as a monk; he did not see Boucher or Lecoq or the Impressionists. He lived like an ascetic. A litre of wine, a loaf of bread and an occasional sausage was a meal. He searched the Bible, Dante, Baudelaire, Hugo, Balzac, for a theme and an heroic mood. He read until dawn by a flickering gas lamp. And Peppino continued to pace the studio; his vibrant, purposeful walk became the heart of Auguste's designs.

"I want you to grow a small beard, and let your hair grow," Auguste told Peppino. "You are going to be a religious subject." Peppino let loose a torrent of rhetoric about how much he adored the saints. He gesticulated with outstretched hands, and looked so magnificent it was as if he had stepped out of the New Testament.

Suddenly Auguste exclaimed, "I see it now—you will be John the Baptist!" The model was stunned. "The way you move, it is perfect. What other men in the Bible have been so active as John, so vital? Now, Peppino, we really have to work!"

His saint must be heroic yet human: a man who came from Nature, from the wilderness, yet who reached out beyond the natural life. He could see this figure striding across a vast desert.

Both Auguste's hands worked as one as he focused on the torso, the legs, hips and shoulders. He wanted to go on modelling all night, but Peppino finally collapsed from fatigue. Auguste looked down at the reclining model without pity, only with concern about whether he would be able to work tomorrow.

Often Rose could not persuade Auguste to come home at night, and he slept, wrapped in a blanket, on the studio floor. It would be dangerous to leave his work; he would lose his energy and momentum. Nothing mattered but "John the Baptist."

While he was working on the legs—the soul of the statue, it seemed to him—he ordered Peppino to walk more energetically. Peppino said he had never seen a figure with such an enormous stride. "Do you think they will believe it?" he asked.

Auguste stared at the earth-spanning stride, took a sip of Cointreau and offered some to the model. "Do you believe it?"

Peppino made a face as he drank the French liqueur, and said, "I don't know what to believe. If anyone had told me that I would work a year for a man who owed me hundreds of francs, I would have said he was lying. But I have."

"I'll pay you. I've already paid you for your regular time."

"But I'm always working overtime. And to make me naked!" Peppino flourished his hands. "What will my friends think?"

"They will think you are quite a man."

Peppino smiled. "But I'm supposed to be a saint."

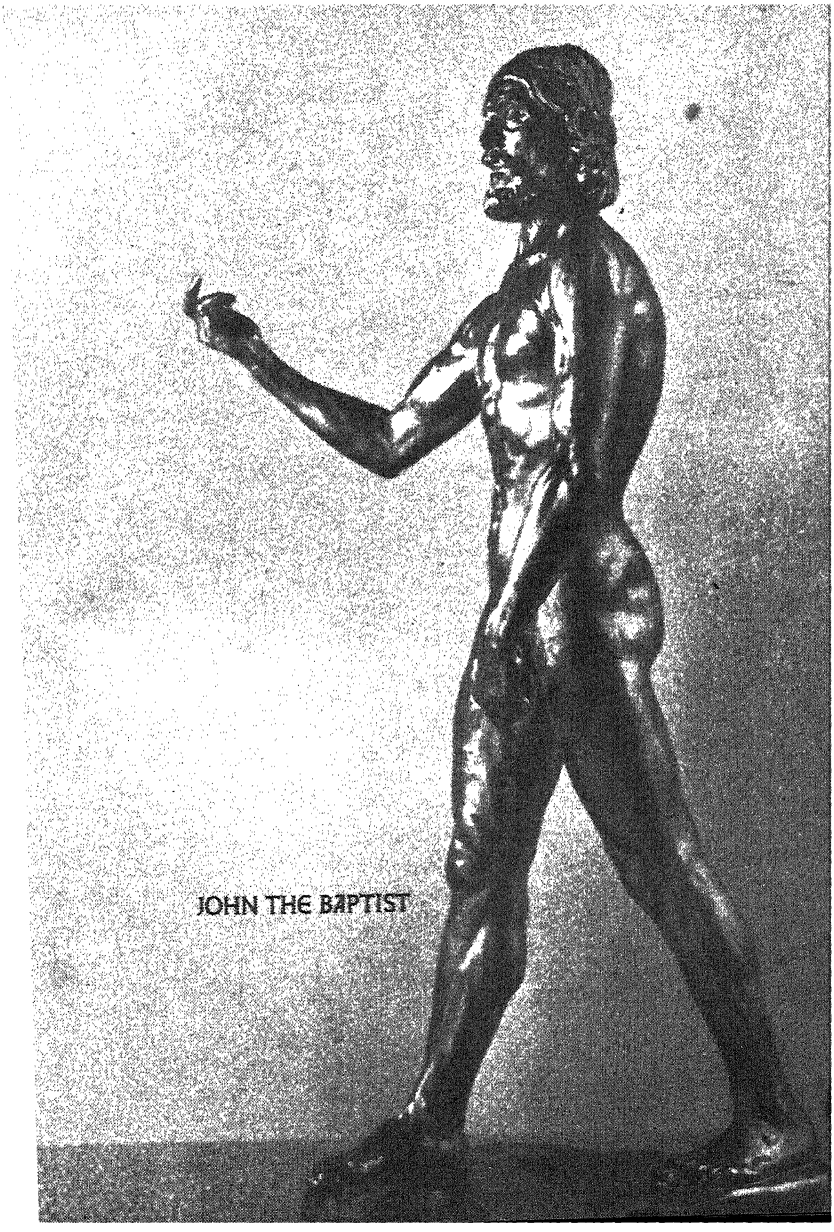
Auguste smiled also. "You have to be, to put up with me."

In the final days of the modelling Auguste finished the face, the grave, proud features of a man illuminated by faith. John had an open mouth and hair down to the neck. The head was raised. He had grandeur, and was possessed by an ideal beyond himself.

Everything was done then, except the hands. Auguste worked on them for days. One afternoon he said to Peppino, "Sculpture requires love; you model a hundred hands to get two." It was growing dark and he worked feverishly. Then suddenly he halted. He circled the figure, peering at it from every side through the spreading darkness. He drew in his breath sharply. This St. John stood for something, had lived for something. He gazed up at him with devotion. He had captured what he wanted. He embraced Peppino. "It's done," he said, "and it's good." For once, he was sure.

WHEN "John the Baptist" was cast in bronze, Auguste carved RODIN in large letters on the base of the statue and sent it and "The Age of Bronze" for consideration by the Salon of 1880. Both were accepted, although the Salon insisted that "St. John" wear a fig leaf. Auguste was enraged until Boucher pointed out that Michelangelo had been obliged to conform also.

He was pleased by the placement of his two statues in a large, light, front gallery. Many people gaped at "The Age of Bronze" because of its notoriety, but "John the Baptist" was regarded quietly, even reverently. Several critics wrote that "John" was incongruous with his wide


JOHN THE BAPTIST

stride, naked body, open mouth, and harsh, unpolished realism; but others were genuinely moved. "John the Baptist" was awarded the third medal for sculpture, and Auguste was invited to the salon of Mme. Charpentier, where many of the pillars of French art and politics met. It was a sign of recognition even more eloquent than the prize.

Auguste hired a Prince Albert frock-coat and grey top-hat, and tried them on so often he almost felt at home in them. He had his beard trimmed and curled.

Now, he was about to leave for the soirée. Rose was in a foul humour because he had refused to take her on the excuse that this was a "professional evening." *Mon Dieu!* he couldn't take her, with her red, work-worn hands, her untidy clothes and hair. *Petit* Auguste, who was almost as tall as he was now, described his costume to Papa, who said, "You must look like a gentleman!"

Papa was sitting at the kitchen table with his hands and head resting on his cane. He was now totally blind, and this was the first time he had been out of bed for weeks. He asked querulously, "Who is going to be there who is so important?"

"Writers, painters, a cabinet member or two, perhaps."

"Cabinet member?" Papa was interested. "Which ones?"

"Gambetta, I am told."

"Our republican lion? Our pillar of the Third Republic?" Papa asked cynically, more royalist than ever now that the republicans were in power. "Is that why you are not taking Rose?"

"Papa, for heaven's sake!" Automatically she sprang to Auguste's defence even though she was furious. She said, "Auguste is right. I would have nothing to say there. I would make him miserable."

"He is never right," said Papa. "Look how hard he has worked, and what has he got at forty but an invitation to go where he will probably be ignored? Auguste, if you had only listened to me and gone into the *préfecture*"

Auguste said, "I must be off. On Sunday we will all go for a picnic in the Bois. Don't wait up for me, Rose."

He grew excited as his cab approached the palatial mansion in the rue de Grenelle. A long line of carriages was entering the courtyard, and he reflected that these people lived in sumptuous mansions and

owned their own victorias, broughams and landaus. He entered the long, magnificent drawing-room, designed and decorated like an art gallery with Gobelin tapestries, glowing, delicate chandeliers and a charming painting by Renoir of Mme. Charpentier and her children.

The room was crowded and he did not see anyone he recognized. Then he saw the host and hostess greeting the arriving guests and he joined the line. The young attractive Charpentiers had become well known as publishers and patrons of the arts. Auguste felt ill at ease as he approached them and introduced himself. M. Charpentier looked blank when he said his name. Madame thought a moment, then said, "Ah, yes, the sculptor——"

Guests pressed behind him and he turned away, lonely and miserable. Liveried servants circulated with trays of food and champagne; everywhere there was movement and animation, but he felt stranded. He was about to leave when Boucher accosted him. He said, "I've been looking for you, Rodin. Come. I'll introduce you to someone who admires your work." He took Auguste by the arm and led him towards a stocky man whom Auguste recognized as Émile Zola, the novelist. Renoir and Manet were beside him. Boucher introduced Auguste to Zola, and Manet said, "Rodin did the 'Saint John' you liked."

Zola said, "I'm glad you are a naturalist, and not a theologian."

"I'm neither," said Auguste. "I'm a sculptor."

"Look at Hugo!" Renoir exclaimed, pointing to Victor Hugo, standing in the centre of the drawing-room surrounded by a crowd of admirers. "He is almost eighty, yet he still boasts of his *amours*."

Victor Hugo was France's greatest man—poet, playwright, novelist, political hero. He had exiled himself from France as a protest against Napoleon III; he was the inspiration of resistance against the Second Empire, the living symbol of republicanism. Wherever there was injustice to mankind, Hugo protested. He had the air of a god, and to many Frenchmen he was one.

Auguste couldn't take his eyes off him. He was fascinated by Hugo's full lips, the passionate, deeply set eyes, the rugged features. "What a head to model!" he said.

"Here's Mallarmé—he knows Hugo well," Renoir said. He told Mallarmé that Rodin wanted to do a head of Hugo.

Mallarmé introduced Auguste to Hugo, who smiled and said, "Ah, *mon cher* Mallarmé." But he barely acknowledged Auguste.

Mallarmé said, "Rodin did the 'Saint John' and 'The Age of Bronze.' "

"Oh, the statue that was cast from life," said Hugo.

This was too much. Auguste almost smashed the glass he was holding, putting it down with a rude jolt.

"Rodin is a fine sculptor," Mallarmé said. "He would do a virile, realistic bust of you."

"No!" Hugo said. "I've had enough of busts. And this friend of yours almost broke his wineglass when he put it down. I prefer more skilful hands. And his 'John' is a peasant!"

"Wasn't John a peasant, monsieur?" said Auguste.

Hugo said wearily, "You have a strenuous manner, Rodin. I will not sit for you." And he turned away.

Mallarmé led Auguste away to another part of the room.

Auguste said, "Hugo has the manners of a dog."

"You're right. But come, I will introduce you to Gambetta."

Rodin liked Gambetta at once. He had an open, strong face with bright, friendly eyes, an air of youthfulness despite greying hair and beard. There was not a trace of arrogance, though he ran the Third Republic. He introduced Rodin to Antonin Proust, the new Minister of Fine Arts. "We've been hearing a great deal about your sculpture," Gambetta said. "I like it that your 'Saint John' is more man than saint."

Boucher joined the group. "Rodin has a lot of fine work in his studio," he said.

"That has never been accepted by the Salon," Auguste said sharply.

"I warn you, Gambetta," Boucher said. "He is an *enfant terrible.* When he gets an idea, nothing changes him."

Gambetta said, "Are you really so stubborn, Rodin?"

"Rebellious, Monsieur Gambetta, not stubborn."

"How can I object to a rebel?"

Everyone smiled now. Gambetta continued, "Antonin Proust and I have been discussing a commission for you, Rodin. There is no question in our minds about the quality of your work. But as a politician, I must be practical about the subject matter, the cost, the time it will take

Would you be interested in doing something for the Third Republic?"

Now what he wanted most fervently was within reach. "Monsieur, I would be honoured to do any work you commission."

"We want a door for a new Musée des Arts Décoratifs that is to be erected in the quai d'Orsay."

"A door like Ghiberti's, worthy to be 'The Gates of Paradise?' "

"I would prefer a more sombre note," said Gambetta. "This is a time of uncertainty, of groping; there are many wounds in France that have not vet healed." There was a heavy silence, then he said, "But if you concentrate on the nude, you may create a scandal."

Auguste exploded, "Nothing is more beautiful, stronger or more subtle than the human figure. It conveys a multitude of emotions. When you cover it, you hide, repress, distort. All genuine sculptors knew this —Praxiteles, Phidias, Donatello, Michelangelo. Nakedness has nothing to do with obscenity or sensuality, but with truth. As in all art, one must not conceal anything." Boucher and Mallarmé braced themselves for an answering explosion, but Gambetta said quietly, "Could Proust and I look at your work? Say this Sunday?"

Auguste agreed.

ON THE SUNDAY Auguste had promised to take his family for a picnic, Gambetta and Antonin Proust visited his studio. Proust strode round examining the sculpture while Gambetta sat down—too stout to walk much. Auguste showed them everything, even his unfinished pieces. Both men were excited by his work.

Gambetta said, "Rodin, your recognition is long overdue." He turned to the "Mignon" and "Bellona" and asked, "Aren't they from the same model at different ages?"

"Yes."

"An attractive face, strong, interesting, but not Parisian?"

"No, not Parisian, Monsieur Gambetta."

"Your wife?" asked Gambetta.

"No. Does it matter?" Auguste asked defiantly.

Gambetta smiled and said, "Of course not. I am not a Parisian either, Rodin. And I come from a humble background also."

He and Proust inspected "John the Baptist," which stood above them

like a crag. "He would make a fine outdoor figure," Gambetta said abruptly. "Rodin, there will be an offer for 'Saint John' and 'The Age of Bronze' from the Luxembourg."

"I am very grateful," Auguste blurted out.

"Wait until you see what is offered. No one spends more unwillingly for someone else's benefit than a Frenchman."

"Shall I be consulted on the placing of the statues? It is vital."

"I recognize that, but it is the province of the Ministry."

Auguste said emotionally, "The sculptor is rarely consulted in the placing of his work. He should be the only one consulted. He is accused of arrogance, when he is the one who is never satisfied; he is the severest critic of his work."

Gambetta sighed. "I know, I know, but we have a bureaucracy."

Auguste looked as if he were going to reject the offer. The silence in the studio was oppressive. Gambetta flushed. All he had to do was turn towards the door and the sales were off. Their eyes met: Gambetta's inflexible and Auguste's immovable. Then as if each of them had proved his strength, the statesman smiled slightly, and so did the sculptor.

Gambetta asked, "Rodin, about the door for our Museum of Decorative Arts—we don't want a religious subject. I have insisted on the separation of Church and State."

"In other words, you are not interested in a door to heaven?"

"Are we, in France, really fulfilling the brotherhood of man? Or are we closer to hell than to heaven, Rodin?"

"To hell," Auguste said grimly.

"A hell of our own making. We have had the bloodiest revolutions in history. We praise all the virtues and practise most of the vices."

Auguste asked, "And you want a door that will mirror these vices? Dante's hell is concrete, visual. . . an enormous door depicting a hell of punishment, of anguish, of desperation. It could have a terrifying power and beauty."

Gambetta asked Proust, "What do you think?"

Proust said, "A gate depicting hell? Magnificent. But it will be a miracle if it succeeds."

Gambetta said, "It might. Rodin, when you meet Turquet, Proust's under secretary, speak to him about a door based on Dante's *Divine*

Comedy. The most important thing is, this door must show our deep concern about France's fate, and about man's fate." He added casually, "And there will be a state studio for you."

AT HOME later, Auguste found a storm brewing. Aunt Thérèse had been sent for by Rose, who was nervous and angry. She poured out her grievances against him—his neglect of her, *petit* Auguste and Papa, and now the broken appointment for the picnic.

"But I have good news," he shouted. "Two sales and a commission!" He kissed Aunt Thérèse warmly. "Now there will be plenty of time for Sunday picnics."

"Less," Rose said. "You will never be home now."

"I'm leaving Carrier-Belleuse. I am a full-time sculptor!" He grabbed Aunt Thérèse and waltzed her round the room. He was awkward and she was old and they fell over each other's feet, but she was caught up in his joy. Auguste cried, "I'm getting a new studio, free."

Rose said mournfully, "So you will be everywhere but home. What statues did you sell?" she asked.

" 'Saint John' and 'The Age of Bronze,' to the Luxembourg, and Gambetta ordered them himself."

Rose whispered, "We'd better not talk too loudly. Papa has had a bad day and he has just fallen asleep."

Auguste was disappointed. "I wanted to tell Papa. He's always said I would never make a living as a sculptor."

"How much are they giving you for the two pieces?"

"He didn't say, but it will be a few thousand francs."

"Can politicians be trusted?"

"Rose, what's come over you? You are full of criticism."

"She's tired," Aunt Thérèse said. "Papa has been cranky." She looked at him proudly. "So Gambetta bought your pieces! Soon you will be a famous sculptor."

"He is now," said Rose, suddenly determined not to be outdone by Aunt Thérèse. "They should have recognized him years ago, when he did 'Mignon,' the 'Bacchante,' when I posed for him. He never had a better model than me. The 'Goddess of War' is as good as the 'John.' But he's never exhibited them. He's ashamed of me. He's——"

"I showed them to Gambetta," Auguste interrupted. "He liked them very much. I will exhibit them if I ever get the chance."

Rose didn't feel pretty any more, but the heads were. She mumbled, "I'm sorry. I always knew you would be recognized."

"You're a good girl, and I appreciate your help. Rosette, this is the happiest day of my life!" He took her in his arms. And when he laughed she joined him, determined to share his joy.

EDMOND TURQUET, Proust's under secretary, offered Rodin 2,200 francs for "John the Baptist" and 2,000 francs for "The Age of Bronze." The price barely came to the cost of casting them in bronze. And there was no assurance that Rodin would be consulted about the placing of the statues.

As for the use of a state studio, Turquet informed him that that would come when his plans for the door were accepted. "Submit them as soon as you can, Monsieur Rodin. The work shouldn't cost more than ten thousand francs."

"But I intend to do at least a hundred figures; the door will have to be very large."

"The size can be decided later. But it would be better if your door is based on the entire *Divine Comedy*, not just the Inferno."

There was no time for arguing; Auguste had work to do.

A few days later, he received the money for his two statues. He felt rich and left Carrier-Belleuse at once. But he was too busy to celebrate his emancipation. Except on Sundays, he was always at the studio preparing his plans for submission to the Ministry of Fine Arts. He spent days studying the *Divine Comedy*, and always came back to the Inferno. Dante's judgment on his age became Auguste's judgment on his *own* age. The deadly sins were the reality, and he must show the anguish and remorse they brought. Man was not governed by beauty and truth, but by anxiety, doubts, sin. The body, so beautiful and inspiring at its best, destroyed itself with excesses of lust, vanity and greed.

Dante's "All hope abandon, ye who enter here" burnt itself into his brain as he sketched plans for the door. It became two doors, then gates, the Gates of Hell. Weeks later he submitted his plans to Turquet.

ON JULY 17, 1880, three days after Paris celebrated Bastille Day as a national holiday for the first time, Turquet informed Auguste that his plans were acceptable and that he would receive 8,000 francs—"Twenty-seven hundred francs when you sign the agreement, the rest as the work progresses."

"Who will judge this progress?"

"An inspector from the Beaux Arts."

Auguste felt a chill of terror at the thought of being in the hands of his ancient enemies.

"Monsieur Rodin, you will finish in three years?"

Auguste was annoyed that Turquet wanted him to set a time limit, when not a shovel of mortar had been mixed for the museum itself.

"I'll do my best," he said. *Mon Dieu*, what else could he say!

A few weeks later he received the official contract, in which his "Gates of Hell" was described as "bas-reliefs to represent the *Divine Comedy* of Dante."

He was given a light, spacious studio in the rue de l'Université. With the money he was saving on his old studio he rented a second studio in the boulevard de Vaugirard, also large and light, and so far from his first studio that no one would be tempted to visit both. In the second studio he did privately commissioned portrait busts.

The more he used the state studio in the rue de l'Université, the better he liked it. At the back were an enormous yard, a garden and two stately rows of chestnut trees. He felt as if he were working in the country, close to Nature. The great studio filled up with clay, terracotta and plaster working models of "The Gates." There were "The Gates" in miniature, in one-third final size, and full size; there were many small pieces—legs, torsos, heads; there were tiny rough figures in many forms.

Peppino and Lisa, an Italian girl Peppino had picked up, posed for him now. Auguste used Lisa for Eve—she had a voluptuous body—and he wanted Peppino to pose for Adam. The pair was to go on top of "The Gates." But Peppino, in demand since he had become known as the model for "St. John," was often late or absent. Auguste hired a new model, Jubert, a professional strong man. Peppino became reliable again when he heard that Jubert was posing with Lisa.

One day Auguste invited Lecoq to see "The Gates." His old teacher limped in one clear, sunny afternoon. He had been ill, and had lost weight, but his eyes still sparkled. "I've returned to teaching," he told Rodin. "My own school. I was tired of being bored. Oh, yes, I know, I'm too old. I'm seventy-eight."

"You don't look it."

"Of course I do. You never could lie well, Rodin." He turned to "The Gates." "The composition is good," he said.

"I'm slow, too slow."

"Naturally. These are hardly figures out of *l'opéra-comique*."

Auguste, feeling understanding from the man whose opinion he respected above any other, cried, "Does this kind of work always have to be so hard?"

"The greater the conception, the greater the effort."

"It will be a catastrophe," Auguste said, suddenly pessimistic.

"Perhaps," said Lecoq cheerfully. "But think of all the individual figures you will get from the doors. They are a laboratory of sculpture. Adam, Eve, Paolo and Francesca will make fine individual pieces. Even if you never finish the doors, you will have a magnificent gallery of portraits."

"Merci, maître," Auguste said meekly.

"I prefer you when you are not so humble. If you ever decide to do Eve less than life-size, I would be happy if I could buy one. An original Rodin." Lecoq sighed.

"I couldn't charge you."

"You can charge everybody. If you don't, you are an idiot. But I must buy an Eve before it gets beyond my means."

"I'll make you a half life-size Eve as soon as I can."

Rodin still had something left from the 2,700 francs and even with such an unreliable patron as the State, he was sure another advance on "The Gates" would be forthcoming soon. Boucher brought him a well-to-do Englishman, Scott Hallam, who wanted to buy a "Bellona" copy in bronze. The 1,200 francs Auguste received for the bust was applied to the increasing cost of "The Gates of Hell." In addition, Boucher wanted a copy of "The Man with the Broken Nose." Auguste gave his friend one for the cost of casting it in bronze.

RODIN visited Monet at Vétheuil, some miles north-west of Paris on the Seine. The painter's wife, Camille, had died recently, leaving him deeply unhappy. He was pleased and touched to see Auguste.

He said, "I'm devoured by a hell. I'm beginning to sell now, the Salon accepts me, and I am eaten up with loneliness. I am a father, and that should help, but it doesn't. I wanted a home and family and love, and she gave them to me without complaint, no matter how poor we were. And we were always poor—the day she died I had to pawn everything of value to get a doctor. And now she is dead, I am lost."

Auguste did not know what to answer. Monet's gloom was overwhelming. When the time came to say *au revoir*, Monet begged Auguste to visit him again. "I know I am not good company, but your coming has helped. I feel better after I express myself. Come back? Will you, please?"

Rodin said he would. Monet's situation suggested still another variation of hell.

But he had sunk into a quicksand. A year had passed since he had started "The Gates," and now it seemed that the more he worked, the farther he was from finishing.

He was delighted when he was invited to London by his old friend Legros, now a famous etcher there. Legros told him that the "Bellona" he had sold to Scott Hallam and "The Man with the Broken Nose" that he had given to Boucher were to be exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in London, and that Auguste was to be guest of honour at the private view.

Auguste's two pieces attracted the most attention at the exhibition, and he heard that the "Bellona" had been sold for double what he had received for it. He had become an investment. The private view concluded with a tea, and he was introduced to William Ernest Henley, Robert Louis Stevenson and Robert Browning, who had all asked to meet him.

Auguste and Henley, a vital, intense man, red-bearded like himself, became good friends. Henley had had one foot amputated, and had spent two years in hospital with tuberculosis of the bone, but he laughed often, swore with gusto, was full of enthusiasm, and shared Rodin's admiration for Gothic architecture.

TURQUET came to view "The Gates of Hell." His politeness was ominous. He said, "The Adam and Eve on top of the doors are not from Dante." And he reminded Rodin that "The Gates" were to be based on the whole *Divine Comedy*, not the Inferno only. "Now, if you could put Dante on top of 'The Gates'—— We would be deeply disappointed if you had to forfeit the commission and——"

"Return the money; when will I get my next payment?"

"Are you ready for an inspector from the Beaux Arts?"

"Why not?"

"It might be unwise at this time," Turquet said.

The Adam and Eve came off "The Gates." Auguste worked on a life-size statue of Eve from which he would cast a miniature for Lecoq. He had Lisa walk about while he studied her ample body. When every detail was fixed in his mind—her wide hips, her full legs, her mobile breasts—he began to model. But he was undecided about the pose. He asked her to stand motionless while he felt her stomach to be certain he had the precise curve—his hands were the best magnifying glass of all—and she instinctively covered her face and breasts with a gesture of shame.

She had given him the answer he wanted. The movement was wonderful. The lifted curve of her knee, suggesting embarrassment, was just right. He must capture her shame—Eve, expelled from the Garden of Eden. He told her to hold the pose.

And when Auguste delivered a half life-size "Eve" to Lecoq, the glow in his old teacher's eyes warmed him. He refused any money.

ONE DAY Mallarmé came to his studio. "I hope you won't be offended," he said, "but someone wants you to do a head of Hugo."

"But not Hugo?" Auguste was prepared to be belligerent.

"No, *mon ami*, not Hugo. That is the difficulty. It must be done in secret. Hugo is adamant about refusing to sit. He doesn't want posterity to have a record of him as an old man. But Juliette Drouet wants it. You know who she is?"

"Everybody does."

"Madame Drouet is a great lady, Rodin. She has been attached to Hugo for fifty years, no matter how badly he treated her. He has had

a wife and many other women, but he has never deserted Madame Drouet. She has worshipped him, protected him, fought for him, from the day they met, when she was one of the great beauties of Paris."

Auguste stared at his unfinished "Gates." Nothing should woo him away. Yet he wanted to do Hugo.

Mallarmé continued, "You will probably not get another chance. Hugo had a stroke a few months ago. I doubt that he will outlive Madame Drouet by much."

"Is she ill?"

"She has cancer. Hugo sees her every day, and you could model him from the alcove adjoining her sick-room. Shall I make an appointment for you?" Auguste nodded.

When he entered the Hugo house in the avenue d'Eylau, which had been changed to the avenue Victor Hugo in honour of the great man's eightieth birthday, he found Juliette Drouet lying on a small couch, her head propped up with pillows; an old woman who wore a simple black velvet dress with white lace at the neck. There was no trace of beauty in her wrinkled features, but she had beautiful white hair.

He bowed and said, "*Bonjour*"; then he noticed a picture of her on the mantel and was drawn to look at it.

"Pick it up, *maître*," she said, seeing his interest. "I was twenty-six then. I had just met Hugo."

The features were perfection, the eyes lovely, the smile tender.

"Such a beautiful face——" he said.

She said, nervously, "I want Hugo's bust to be truthful, but don't be cruel with him, Monsieur Rodin. He doesn't like being old."

"No one likes being old. I'm past forty."

"Past forty." She smiled wistfully. "You're a young man. Do your best, will you, *maître*?"

"I will do my best. Hugo's head has grandeur."

"Remember, he must never know. He would not allow it."

"Then why do you want the head, Madame?"

"He is here every day, but the evenings grow lonely. I shall feel as if he is with me when the bust is done." She leaned back on the pillows, exhausted. "It is a risk, Monsieur Rodin, but I will try to keep him occupied. We must not delay. We have not much time."

It was arranged for Rodin to be admitted secretly at the back of the mansion, and to go up the winding stairway from the kitchen. He would set up his studio in an alcove off her room, with his clay, armatures, stands and sketching material. Heavy curtains were hung between the alcove and the sick-room to hide him. When he wanted to observe Hugo, he could open them as much as was safe.

Auguste told Rose about Hugo, knowing he could trust her. She was pleased that he had confided in her, and fascinated by the devotion of Juliette Drouet to Hugo.

"Fifty years!" she exclaimed. "And he never married her?"

"That would have spoilt it."

"How?" Rose flushed.

"He would have felt tied down. It would have made him resent her. Besides, he was married."

"He could marry her now. His wife is dead."

"Nothing is as enduring as an emotional attachment. One can be married and not be attached at all."

Rose kissed him and said, "The head of Hugo will do you good. Now you won't have to worry about the Salon."

Hugo went to see Juliette Drouet every day, no matter how busy he was. Tender and solicitous, he read to her, wearing the spectacles which vanity kept him from using at any other time; he gave her her medicine, ate with her to encourage her appetite.

Auguste liked his model best, however, when he told Juliette the news; then Hugo paced up and down, animated and vital, denouncing the *petite bourgeoisie* or criticizing Gambetta for not including him in his cabinet. At such times Auguste sketched furiously.

He blocked out the head in drypoint etchings, a technique he had learned from Legros, for a permanent record in case he could not finish the head from life. Juliette was growing perceptibly weaker, although she sought to hide it from Hugo, refusing to take to her bed, and he insisted on her believing that she would get better. Hugo's spirit pervaded Rodin's clay models, the spirit that never admitted defeat, that saw nobility in humanity though rarely in individuals. The head became a statement of Hugo's faith.

This was the most difficult work Auguste had ever attempted, for he

rarely got a clear view of Hugo. To work in silence was hard, but hardest of all was being unable to touch the subject, to verify the bone structure. He hadn't been so aware of his near-sightedness for years.

After a month he had done two rough heads of Hugo in clay. He knew he would not be able to finish a head in bronze while his subject was still available. Juliette was failing rapidly, and Hugo rocked her back and forth to comfort her and to ease her pain. She refused to cry when he was present.

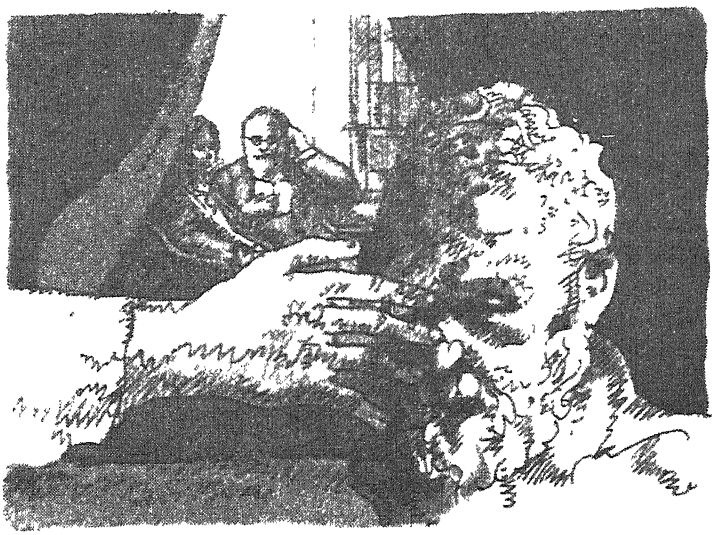
Yet when Auguste suggested that he stop working, she murmured, "*Maître*, there's no need to stop," and struggled to a sitting position. "Show me the head." He brought her the clay model he liked best. She smiled, and asked, "You will finish it?"

"Of course. It will be at your side, as you wished."

"I would like to think so, *mon cher* Rodin; the facts are against me. You have given him an unusually thick head, but I like the expression. It is heroic, virile. That would please him."

"It will be in bronze in a few weeks."

"A few weeks?" She smiled wearily. "Keep working, *maître*."



Several weeks later he entered the house to find her sprawled unconscious outside Hugo's bedroom. He picked her up tenderly, carried her to her couch, and called her maid. Smelling salts revived her, but she refused to call a doctor. Next day she took to her bed.

Hugo was horrified at the idea that she was dying and leaving him. Then he grew concerned about himself. Gambetta, apparently in the prime of life, had wounded himself in the hand while testing a gun for the army, and had died of blood poisoning on December 31, 1882. This worried Hugo, who was almost twice Gambetta's age, while Auguste felt he had lost a good friend.

And now Juliette grew worse; her room was filled with nurses and doctors, and Auguste had to remove his work from the alcove to the studio. A week later Juliette died. Auguste had expected it, yet he was shocked; he had come to care for her. He didn't know what to do with his unfinished heads, so he threw moist cloths over them.

BEFORE AUGUSTE could decide what to do next, Papa became ill. He was eighty-one, and the doctor said it was a matter of days.

Auguste was with him all the time now. He started to paint him in oils, which would be less disturbing to him than sculpture. Most of the time Papa lay in a coma and Auguste painted his strong nose, small white beard, clear blue eyes, and gave him the ruddy skin of the Papa he remembered as a child, although he was as pale as wax now.

Then, one afternoon, Papa recovered consciousness and demanded to see everybody. Rose brought in Aunt Thérèse and *petit* Auguste, now a plump young man of seventeen. When Papa heard *petit* Auguste's voice his face lit up.

"When I am gone, listen to Mama," Papa told *petit* Auguste.

"Yes, *Grand-père*." The boy's voice broke.

"Don't cry," said Papa. "It's not grown-up."

"I'm not crying," sobbed *petit* Auguste. "You're getting better."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Papa. "You don't lie any better than your father. Come close." *Petit* Auguste did, and Papa kissed him tenderly on both cheeks. Then he reached for Aunt Thérèse, who said, holding his hand, "You will fool them, Jean, you will see. You will be yelling at all of us again, like old times."

Suddenly Papa looked ghastly and whispered, "Let me talk to Rose and Auguste." Then, feeling Rose's arms round him, he said, "Is he neglecting you again?"

"No, no, Papa," said Rose, fighting to hide her tears. "Auguste is working hard. He's painting a picture of you now."

"A picture?" grumbled Papa. "He's a sculptor. Has he received another payment on those monsters, 'The Gates?'"

"Not yet," said Rose. "But he will, *mon cher Papa*. Now, I'm sure the doctor would say you've talked enough."

"It's too late for the doctor. Auguste, I told you that you would never make a living as a sculptor."

"Of course, Papa, of course," said Auguste.

"Where's your hand, Auguste?" Pulling on Auguste's hand, Papa raised himself to a sitting position. "Auguste, be good to Rose. She has been like a daughter to me. Promise me you will marry her?"

"I can't promise that. But I promise to take care of her."

"That's not enough," Papa persisted, breathing heavily. "Promise me you will marry her."

"Well . . . some day," said Auguste with a sigh. "Some day."

Papa's sightless eyes stared at Auguste, and Auguste repeated, "I promise—some day," and Papa smiled and said, "*Mon Dieu*, you are stubborn, it's your blood." Papa sat proudly another moment and then slumped. Auguste's powerful hand held his while Rose cried and prayed and then went for a priest. But by the time the priest arrived Papa was dead. After Papa was buried in a family plot which Auguste had bought, Auguste took Rose to their new house in the rue des Grands Augustins. When she saw it, she exclaimed, "A whole house! Can we afford it, *chéri*?"

"They'll pay me when the inspector comes to judge 'The Gates.' And I've had a number of commissions offered to me, but I've had so much on my mind—Juliette, and now Papa" He gulped. He was astonished at how much he missed Papa.

Rose said earnestly, "You have to stop mourning, Auguste. Everybody dies, but art lives on. Good art, like yours."

Her *naiveté* made him smile. He led her into their new home and showed her where to hang his portrait of Papa.

Part V—The Achievement

THE MORNING Auguste waited for the inspector from the Beaux Arts was an anxious one. A year had passed since Papa's death and "The Gates of Hell" was as far from completion as ever. But he had decided on its final form. He stood at the door of the large studio in the rue de l'Université, "The Gates" towering above him with the finished figures: the treacherous and ill-fated Count Ugolino; Paolo and Francesca, the tragic lovers; the Prodigal Son; and many struggling, contorted nudes. These creatures of the underworld were possessed by a demonic anguish and ferocity.

But his apprehensions grew. The Beaux Arts was his ancient enemy, a citadel of refined classicism. "The Gates" was an orgy of sensuality and the figure on the tympanum at the top of "The Gates," which he had modelled after Dante, was wrong. There was no tension in the thoughtful figure sitting with his elbow on his knee and his hand at his chin. The more he stared at "The Gates," the more things he saw that did not satisfy him.

He started to dictate his corrections to *petit* Auguste, who now worked full time in the studio. The boy fell hopelessly behind and was easily distracted—especially when a young, pretty model sauntered by. Auguste sighed and stopped his dictating. He needed a dependable secretary, he thought irritably.

Petit Auguste asked, "May I leave now? Mama wants me to help her choose furniture."

"We have enough furniture. I am not Louis the Fourteenth."

A few minutes later, when Rodin was shifting "The Gates" into a better light, the boy was gone. The only time *petit* Auguste wanted to stay in the studio was when an attractive female model was posing. Auguste had forbidden him to have anything to do with the models—he was only eighteen, still a child!

He came out of his reverie when he was informed that the inspector from the Beaux Arts had arrived. Auguste saw a slim, dark man with

observant brown eyes. He led him to "The Gates." The inspector stared at them intently before he said, "This is not finished, is it? How much longer do you think it will take?"

"Two years. Three, perhaps."

"You said that three years ago," the inspector reminded him. "The Beaux Arts feels a definite date should be agreed upon."

"I haven't received any more payments. You are much behind schedule, too."

"Really?" The inspector looked embarrassed. "There have been so many changes of cabinet in the last few years."

"I've gone into debt on account of 'The Gates.'"

"If you got another payment in a month, how long would it take you to finish them?"

"Three years. No more, I promise."

The inspector said, "Your individual figures are superb, a welcome change from the cold classical nudes. When one enters your 'Gates,' one feels in a real hell. I don't care for the poet sitting on the top, but the Ugolino with the hollow eyes is fascinating."

Auguste stammered, amazed, "But I thought the Beaux Arts, their views——"

The inspector said, "It is a true work of art. I will recommend extra payments at once."

Auguste received 7,000 francs, and was assured there would be more forthcoming, although already he had had more than the amount originally agreed upon. He was puzzled by this generosity, until Boucher told him that there were rumours about Paris of a royalist plot to destroy "The Gates of Hell." The rumours had aroused a wave of public opinion in Rodin's favour.

"Now you can take your time," said Boucher. "By the way, I have a student who wants to study with you, Camille Claudel."

Auguste had one of the most active studios in Paris now, with students and assistants working for him. But he said, "I don't want any female students. I have enough trouble with my female models already."

"She says she must work with Auguste Rodin or no one."

"I could use a secretary," Auguste said impatiently.

He was startled when Boucher brought Camille Claudel to his studio

the next day. She was beautiful, he realized, with a surge of emotion. How gracefully she stood, how elegant she was. Her features had a harmonious flow of line; she had large, light, grey-blue eyes. The past few months he had been toiling like a hermit in a cave. This young woman reminded him that he was still a man. Yet when Boucher introduced her, he nodded curtly.

Boucher said, "Rodin has bad manners, but he is quite busy."

She said in a clear, incisive voice, "I am not interested in his social behaviour. I want to study with him."

Auguste said, "Mademoiselle, can you work as a secretary?"

"I am a sculptress, not a secretary," she said.

"But I need a secretary."

They stared at each other. She was far too beautiful to be a sculptress, he decided, and too patrician to be a secretary.

She saw a stocky, middle-aged man in a long white sculptor's smock. He reminded her of a medieval stone-carver at work on one of the great cathedrals. She noticed his broad, muscular shoulders, his heavy, brawny arms, his large, thick hands with their life-giving fingers and their huge square-nailed thumbs, which continued to caress the clay he had been working on. She said, "*Maître*, I could help as your secretary, but I must also work at sculpture."

"And sweep out the studio if necessary?"

"If necessary," she said.

"And clean up all the debris? Work long hours?"

"As long as is needed."

Her delicate features were a miracle, Rodin thought. He marvelled at the excitement that surged through him. But this was absurd. He was too old, a family man. He said, "You can start next week."

Camille worked twice as hard as any of Auguste's other students. She swept and cleaned, built armatures and scaffolding, and worked on her own sculpture. She began to model a head of Rodin, and as it took shape she became hopeful that he might not be too displeased. One morning she heard a cough and turned to see him staring at the head. He said, "You've made the nose too prominent and the mouth too thin and the eyes are nothing. But you are young; you will learn not to confuse truth with unkindness. And your touch is good."

From then on he gave her individual attention. The few minutes he spent with her each day became the most fruitful of her life. When she thought she had finished the head, after weeks of the hardest work she had ever done, he said, "It's not right. Study your subject more closely. You haven't captured his inner necessity."

She said, "You are never satisfied with what I do!"

"I am never satisfied with my own work. Have you seen my heads of Hugo?"

"No. I didn't know you had made any, *maître*."

"They are a secret. They are not finished, because I am not satisfied with them. Would you like to see them?"

"I would be honoured."

He gave her the address of a third studio he had rented near the Île St. Louis, and said, "Don't tell anyone. That is my private studio."

She was a little frightened, yet excited.

"How old are you, mademoiselle?" he asked.

"Twenty."

"I could be your father."

But you are not, she thought.

CAMILLE was disappointed by the run-down studio, near the Île St. Louis, with its blistered paint, broken shutters, and the clutter and dust that were everywhere.

Auguste smiled at her dismay and said, "I'm getting another, near the place d'Italie."

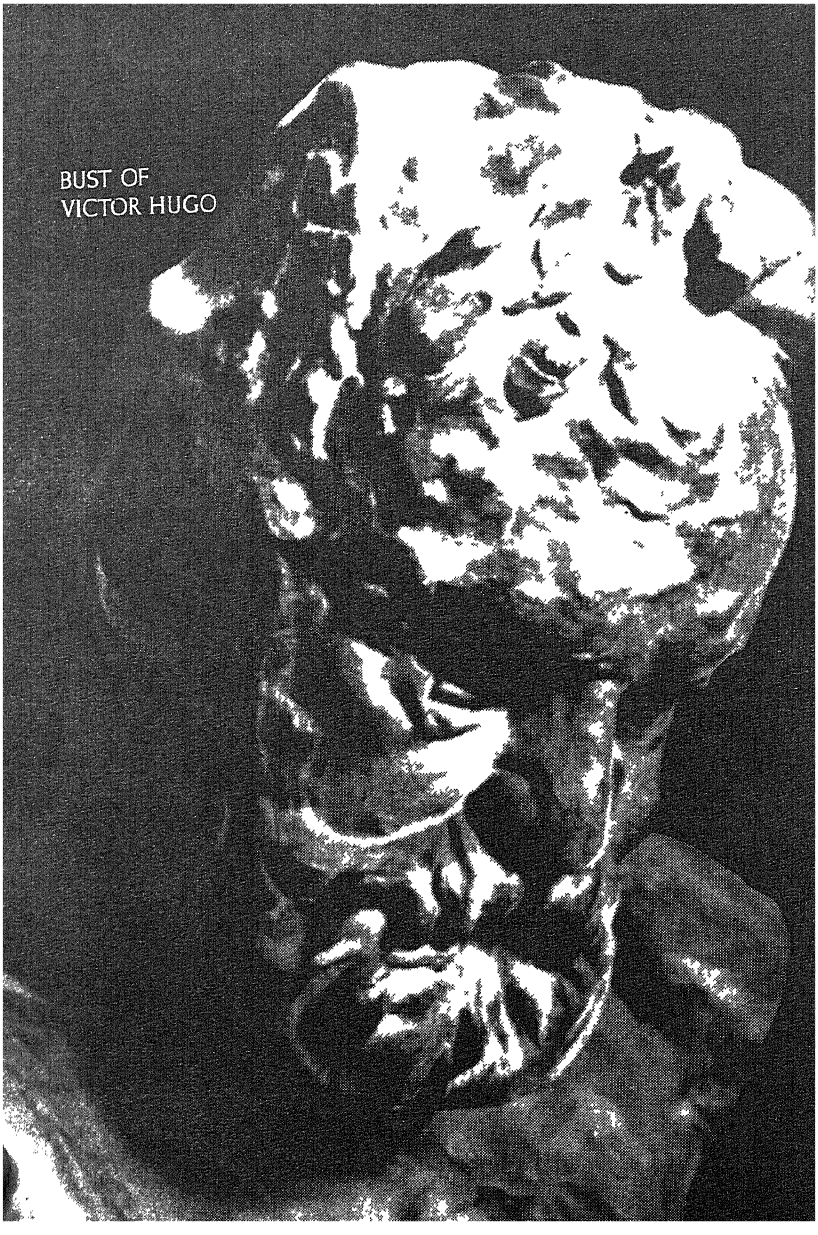
Camille noticed a plaster cast, the head of a pretty young woman, in the corner. She asked, "Who is this?"

Auguste said, "None of your business, mademoiselle."

He was rude, she thought furiously. She snapped, "It's classical, almost Roman."

He said, "You're right. I was being influenced by Carrier-Belleuse. Here are the Hugos." He took the cloths off the two heads. "Now the truth, mind you!"

"Of course," she said. She would be as harsh as he was. But suddenly she could not speak. It was as if Hugo were facing her. *Le Père* Hugo, watching over his beloved France. She could feel the veins throbbing


BUST OF
VICTOR HUGO

in his forehead. Deeply moved, she stumbled to the one chair in the studio and sat down.

"You don't like them, mademoiselle?" He looked unexpectedly vulnerable. "I told you they were unfinished."

"No, you're wrong. They are finished."

"But the expression, I find I always have to change it."

"Because his expression is always changing."

He studied her as she sat there. She had a wistful quality; he could model her just as she was now. She raised her eyes to him. Their gaze met, then fell away.

"I would like——" He paused.

"You want me to pose?"

Their eyes met again and held. "*Merci*, mademoiselle. We will work in my new studio, as soon as I get it, every Saturday."

THE NEW studio was small but clean, with good daylight. Camille liked the iron gates set in a high archway, the marble fountain in the courtyard, and the high walls that enclosed it. Auguste said that first Saturday, "The studio is part of a three-story house. I have a bedroom on the second floor, and a storeroom for my materials. Do you like it?"

She smiled. "Yes. What shall I do, *maître*?"

"Just walk about, as the models do in the big studio."

She felt she had walked miles before he put a line to paper. Then he seemed hardly to look at her as he sketched. He spent the whole day planning a head of her. When he said, "Next Saturday," she agreed. During the next few weeks he modelled her head, her hands, her arms, all as separate pieces. He was positive she had a model's body and felt frustrated because he couldn't see it.

One Saturday he started to stroke her arms to make sure he had modelled the proper contour. He was only doing what he did with all his models, but she grew rigid. He said irately, "You may go. I do not want a model who can't forget her sheltered life."

She didn't move, but asked, "Do I have a model's figure?"

"Probably."

"Will it help if you see my body?"

He shrugged. "But naturally."

She hesitated, then said, "Will you turn round while I undress?" Several minutes later she whispered, "I'm ready, *maître*."

She was as perfectly formed as he had thought—a long, graceful torso, a tapering waist, pliant, well-developed legs, small buttocks, and breasts full yet firm. And he was delighted with the rosy freshness of her skin: now he had a subject worthy of marble.

He ordered her to stride up and down while he drew her a hundred times. It was nightfall when she halted because she was exhausted. He said sharply, "You're too stiff. Walk again."

She did so, hesitantly. He stopped her. He had to stroke her waist to catch the exact contour of the flesh. Her nearness gave him an overwhelming need to possess her. The touch of his superb hands sent a wave of turbulent feeling through Camille. She clung to him as if shaken by a convulsion.

Auguste led her upstairs. Romantic love was the most dangerous of all, he knew, but he was beyond caring.

Now Auguste spent Wednesdays as well as Saturdays at the new studio with Camille. She was the image of beauty, he thought, the embodiment of all the things he desired in a woman; she made him feel young just with her smile. Wherever he was with her, Paris became romantic and gay. They strolled about the city looking at the sculpture in the place de l'Opéra and in the gardens of the Luxembourg. He had never expected to find a love with whom he could share his thoughts. She was well-read, never conventional in her thinking.

She told Auguste that she was the eldest of three children: her younger sister, Louise, was determined to be a great pianist, and her brother, Paul, had dreams of becoming a poet-dramatist. She lived with her mother, sister and brother; her father, a civil servant, was in Rambouillet. Her mother reproached her for the nights she did not come home; Camille sensed that she prayed desperately for the salvation of her soul, and there were times when Camille felt guilty. But she was willing to give up everything for Auguste. She was happy, studying and working with him, posing for hours, and being shouted at.

She became his favourite model. He did busts of her which he called "Dawn," "Iris" and "Thought," then put them in marble.

ROSE, seeing Auguste only when he came home to sleep, suspected he was interested in another woman. When her uncertainty became too much to bear, she went to the big studio in the rue de l'Université.

She had never seen such pandemonium. Wherever she looked there were students and models and sculpture in progress: hands, arms, legs, torsos, heads, complete figures; groups in clay, plaster, bronze and marble. "The Gates" towered above everything like a vast mountain, with more figures on the main model than she could count.

Then she saw Auguste and hurried over to him.

"Rose!" he cried. "You've come to spy on me!" He led her to the door and ordered her to stay away. When she reminded him of how she used to help him in his studio, he said shortly, "That's not necessary any more. If you come here again, I'll lock the door on you." It was a dreadful humiliation.

After this visit to the studio she asked *petit* Auguste, "Is your father interested in—someone else?"

He shrugged. "He is a connoisseur of beautiful women, but everything, in this studio at least, is work."

"In *this* studio? Doesn't he work in his other one too?"

Petit Auguste didn't want to hurt Mama, yet the old man deserved it. He said, "The *maître* is never at either of his studios on Wednesdays and Saturdays. And one of the students is always absent those days, too. Camille Claudel. She is quite pretty."

"Oh!" Her face turned grey. "Do you know where he goes?"

"There are rumours he has other studios no one knows about."

The following Saturday morning when Auguste left the house after breakfast, Rose trailed him. She paused outside the new studio, near the place d'Italie, for a few minutes, then knocked. A beautiful young woman, half Rose's age, opened the door, her head tied up in a duster, a brush in her hand.

This was the most infuriating of all, thought Rose. No one else could serve Auguste as she could! The two women stared at each other. The door was only partly open, and Rose could not see Auguste but she could hear him discoursing on Gothic architecture.

Rose pushed her way in through the door, past a white-faced Camille, and announced, "I'm Madame Rodin."

Auguste said, "Rose, you are making a fool of yourself. You and I are not married." He felt shaken. But he must impress upon both women that *no one* ran his life.

She hates me, thought Camille, she would kill me if she could. She retreated behind the sculpture, dusting frantically.

Rose started to follow Camille, but Auguste halted her. "You are not married to me," he repeated. "Why shouldn't Camille and I live together if we choose?"

"What about me?"

"Everyone knows that you are my companion, except we are not married. I support you, and put up with your atrocious scenes." Rose was crying bitterly, her face buried in her hands.

"Please, Rose, let's not be stupid, let's not——" He handed her a hundred francs. "Here, get the chairs you wanted. You have your place in our home."

Rose was a woman to protect, he thought, but Camille was a woman to cherish. Rose was dependable, but Camille was the sunlight. Then suddenly he was in a rage. Who had told Rose about this studio? He demanded to know. Rose blushed.

"*Petit* Auguste!" he shouted. "The spy! The cheat!"

"You're not going to dismiss him, Auguste? Please, don't," Rose pleaded. "You won't be hard on him? He's all I have left."

He put his arm round her and guided her to the door. "*Ma chatte*, you know I couldn't manage without you. Nobody takes better care of me than you."

It was incredible, Rose thought sadly as she left; no matter how badly he treated her, she could not argue against his embrace.

When Rose had left, Camille said, "I cannot stay here."

Auguste retorted, "You have to stay. We haven't finished the 'Danaïd' you're posing for." Camille wanted to slap him in the face. Then he said, almost apologetically, "She's a savage, a peasant."

"And I, Auguste? Did you ever say you loved me?" she cried, angry with herself for being driven to say this, and thus even angrier at him.

"As long as I model you, my dear Camille, you have nothing to complain about."

"Such arrogance," she stormed, but she did not leave.

That night *petit* Auguste told Auguste he was going into the army. He had never felt that Rodin was his father, and he couldn't tell him the truth, that he was fleeing from the studio.

Auguste said, "Well, perhaps it is the first sensible thing you've done. There you will have to listen to authority." And he turned away to hide his deep disappointment.

THE NEXT few years he threw himself into a profusion of work, his favourite piece being an amorous study in white marble which he called "Eternal Spring." For this he designed a huge rock upon which reclined a sunlit Adonis embracing a glistening nymph.

There were also many commissions—two of them Auguste especially prized. The first was a monument to Victor Hugo, to be placed in the Panthéon, burial place of France's famous dead. Hugo had died on May 22, 1885, two years after Juliette Drouet, and had been buried in the Panthéon, after a funeral procession that had been followed by two million Frenchmen.

But the most exciting commission was for the town of Calais. Auguste won a competition to execute a monument in honour of the sacrifice of the heroic burghers of Calais, in 1347. The city, after being besieged by the English for nearly a year, had been forced by lack of food to surrender. When Edward III had been about to carry out his threat to raze Calais and kill all its inhabitants, six leading citizens had offered themselves to him, with nooses round their necks and carrying the keys of the city, as the price for the lives of their fellow citizens. The story stirred Auguste, and he went to work on this monument with a fanatical fervour.

One night, he summoned Boucher to the studio in the boulevard de Vaugirard where he and Camille had been labouring since early morning with almost nothing to eat. Camille was ready to drop. Auguste paced round his working model of "The Burghers" in his carpet slippers while she followed him, awaiting his instructions.

Camille said to Boucher, "He never stops working. He works by candlelight, night after night, and the studio is so damp he'll catch his death of cold. He has rheumatic pains in his hands."

Boucher said, "You work so oddly, Rodin. You don't carry one work

to its conclusion, then do another, but work on many at the same time. No wonder you haven't finished 'The Gates.' "

Auguste said, "I have to explore."

"But Calais asked for only one burgher—Eustache de Saint-Pierre, the leader. Now you want to do six."

"Six surrendered as hostages," Auguste said. He recited from the historian, Froissart: " 'The six burghers, bare-headed, their feet naked, with halters round their necks and the keys of the town and castle in their hands, said good-bye to their loved ones, sure they would never see them again.' "

"Oh!" cried Boucher. "I agree it is touching."

"What Calais has offered for the entire project will barely cover the cost of one figure," Auguste said gloomily. "And they argue about everything, date of delivery, size of the figures, final costs."

Camille said hesitantly, "Auguste, I'm tired." She didn't dare say exhausted.

Auguste didn't answer, and Boucher thought sadly: Camille has her hero now, but she may live to regret it. He said, "You will never see a franc from Calais, Rodin."

"I'm going ahead anyhow. Camille, show Boucher the figures."

Camille picked up a candle and led Boucher round the six burghers. *Mon Dieu!* thought the younger sculptor, Auguste had truly brought the burghers back to life. There was a feeling of grandeur about them as they faced death, for this was their own choice. The burghers wore shrouds which draped their sorrowful bodies—human sepulchres in stone, Boucher reflected. What a wonderful group! He said aloud, "Why, you are making six Christs!"

"They are not Christs. They are human beings like any of us. Do you like them, Alfred?"

"It is not a question of liking," said Boucher. "I am sad because you are wasting your energy. Will you stop working on 'The Burghers,' until Calais makes up its mind to pay you?"

"Stop?" Auguste glanced at Boucher as if he were insane. "No!"

But he began to spend more time on the Victor Hugo monument. In the evenings he read everything he could about the poet; the

following days he transmuted this into sculpture. He toiled intensely, with Camille at his side. For the head he used one of those he had modelled for Mme. Drouet, but the body was that of a younger man. He chose as his theme what he considered the peak of Hugo's life, his rebellion against Napoléon le Petit, when Hugo had gone into exile in Guernsey. He modelled Hugo sitting before the sea, part of the rock that had withstood the sea for centuries, a free, naked Hugo, naked as the sea and sun. Nature did not drape a natural element and neither would he.

HE HAD BEEN labouring on Hugo for many months when Turquet, from the Ministry of Fine Arts, came into his studio to find out, once and for all, when "The Gates" would be finished. Over the years Rodin had received payments totalling 25,700 francs.

Annoyed that the sculptor was working on the Hugo monument, Turquet announced, "The Ministry wants 'The Gates' by next year, 1889, for the Exposition Universelle."

Auguste's eyes lit up. "*Merci, mon ami*, it would be a great honour. But 'The Gates' will take a few more years."

"If you show them at the Exposition, the whole world will learn about your work. There will be thousands of foreign visitors. We are dedicating the Eiffel Tower; it is the hundredth anniversary of the Revolution. 'The Gates' would become a patriotic monument."

"Do you think I like missing this opportunity? But I cannot show work that does not satisfy me!"

"Rodin, if you push us any more, you will lose all."

Auguste did not reply and Turquet left.

Now Camille became difficult. It was one of their regular Saturdays at the studio near the place d'Italie. He had ordered her to model for a romantic pairing of a woman sitting on a man's lap, entwined with him in a passionate kiss. She refused. She said, "It is too embarrassing, to be depicted in the arms of another man."

He retorted, "This sudden attack of modesty is unforgivable in an artist. You sound like a *bourgeoise*."

Camille's irritation increased, and Auguste, delighted with her animation when she was angry, ordered her to pose. When she still refused,

he was irate. He was not going to involve her with another man; she was being a prude.

She said, "How can you want me to embrace another man?"

"I *don't*!" He was so possessive in his denial that she glowed. He stated, "We will do a new nude."

"You will not pair me later? You did that for 'Eternal Spring'—modelled me as a single figure, and then paired me." She made that sound like a betrayal. "It is so sensuous it frightens me."

"Good. Then I'm on the right track. We'll get it ready for the exhibition."

"What exhibition? You haven't mentioned it to me."

"Claude Monet and I are considering an exhibit in Paris. At the Georges Petit Gallery, to coincide with the Exposition Universelle."

"And you kept this a secret from me?"

Auguste shrugged. He hadn't told her the worst: that he had no intention of asking her or Rose to the opening, it would be too embarrassing.

"Are you showing 'The Burghers?' "

"I'm not sure. *Chérie*, we haven't much time left. I have to see how many of my pieces are ready, and I need your help." He took her hands in his, and said affectionately, "Camille, you are an intelligent and beautiful artist, with genuine emotion and understanding. We mustn't spoil that."

THE Georges Petit Gallery was strategically located near the Exposition Universelle, and many distinguished guests were invited to the private view of the joint exhibition.

Rodin, now forty-eight, could hardly believe this was happening to him. He said to Monet when they were placing their work at the gallery, "Claude, this could be a disaster."

Monet replied, "We will survive. It is the only way to overcome the Salon."

"Seventy paintings by you, thirty-six pieces by me. A lot of work."

"A lifetime. This is a truly retrospective show."

Auguste was silent, recalling his bitter battle with official French art. He watched Monet arrange his paintings and was sad at how much

his friend had aged: the painter's broad, handsome features had become lined and careworn; his black hair and beard had turned grey; his brown eyes, once so bright, were bitter. Monet's large body had grown shapeless with middle age, but he still looked immensely strong, a bear of a man to paint such fragile pictures, done in luminous colours that captured the quality of sun and air, the infinite nuances of light. He had suffered dreadful privation for his painting, his beloved wife had died for lack of money, he had starved and frozen and been forced to beg, he had been ridiculed and rejected time and time again; but he had never flattered or compromised. And now he could sell as much as he wanted. At the private view they stood side by side at the entrance to the gallery, greeting the visitors.

The President of the Republic, M. Carnot, entered with Edward, Prince of Wales. Behind them was Georges Clemenceau, the doctor turned politician-journalist, determined never to forgive Germany, with Eugène Guillaume, still director of the Beaux Arts. Auguste saw Degas and Henley arguing vigorously; Renoir, limping along beside Cézanne; Daudet, Zola, the poet Mallarmé, Anatole France; Turquet and Antonin Proust; the scholarly composer César Franck and his pupil-protégé, Vincent d'Indy; the flamboyant Sarah Bernhardt, accompanied by the playwright Victorien Sardou. The gallery filled with top-hats, frock-coats, canes, beards; there was the clatter of carriage after carriage on the cobble-stones outside.

Now President Carnot was staring intently at "The Burghers," and holding Rodin's arm. He said, "How moving they are, Rodin. Calais should be greatly pleased."

"I'm not sure, Monsieur President. I've had to put them in a stable until Calais makes up its mind. I have to take private commissions so I can afford the public ones."

President Carnot looked angry. He asked, "What about 'The Gates of Hell,' Rodin? You've been paid for them."

"They are unfinished."

"Most of your work is unfinished."

"Is Nature ever finished, Monsieur President?"

"I am an engineer. I finish what I start."

Auguste bowed slightly. "That is the difference between us."

Proust, standing by, thought anxiously: Rodin is destroying this wonderful opportunity. The President's face had turned a flaming red. But before Proust could change the subject, they were joined by the Prince of Wales. He said, "I hear 'The Gates of Hell' are the talk of Paris. They were my old friend Gambetta's favourite project, weren't they?"

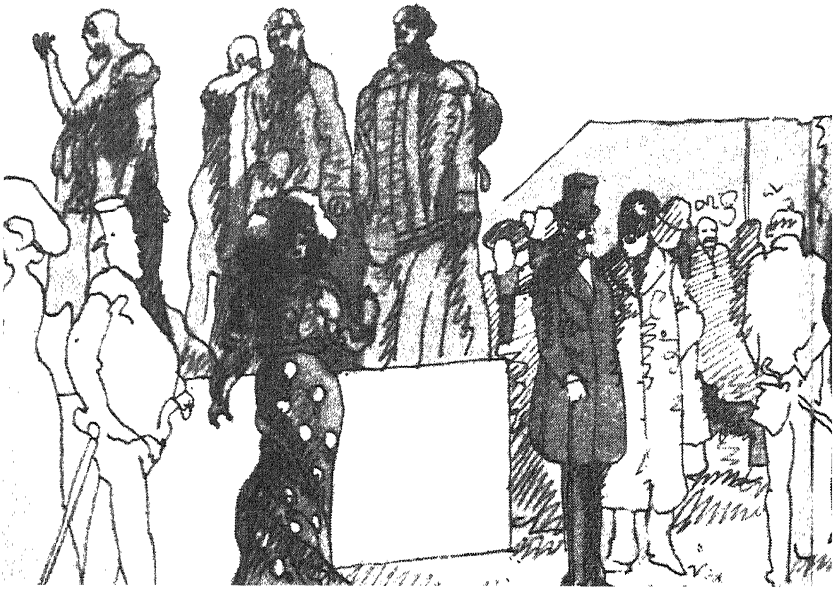
"Yes, your Highness," said Auguste. "He was a great man."

"Did he ask for a time limit?" asked the Prince of Wales.

"It was discussed, your Highness. But do you tell a tree how many years it needs to be full-grown?"

"I wouldn't quarrel with a man's art any more than I would quarrel with his taste," the Prince of Wales said.

"The critics resent what they call my 'unfinished sculpture,' and Monet's 'pictures of nothing.'"



The Prince turned to greet several beautiful women and Rodin tried to lose himself in the crowd. The gallery was full of voices whispering, " 'The Burghers' are decadent. . . . 'The Burghers' are ugly. . . . Look at the bulging stomach he has given 'Eve,' she must be pregnant. He has gone too far!"

Then Guillaume, standing before the unfinished Hugo monument, angrily accosted Rodin, and expressed shock that the great poet was shown naked.

"But we are all naked," Auguste said wearily. "As Cervantes said, 'Naked came I into the world, and naked I must go out.' " Auguste loved the body for the body's sake, not for sensuality—it was for him as expressive as the human face was for Rembrandt.

Before Auguste could flee, Boucher was congratulating him. "This is the peak moment of your life. Look, Degas and Henley are quarrelling



about your work as if it were their own." Boucher pointed to the painter and the writer, standing in front of "The Man That Walks." Henley was saying, "Reality is what the artist sees. Rodin has imposed Rodin on reality."

Degas asked, "Do you like 'The Man That Walks?' "

Henley said, "It has wonderful movement."

"Without a head?"

"Does one walk with one's head?"

Degas for once looked disconcerted and Auguste was pleased with Henley's defence of his work. Then Auguste saw Lecoq standing in the doorway, very thin, very aged, yet trying to stand straight even as he leaned heavily on his thick cane.

Tears came to Auguste's eyes. He offered Lecoq his arm, and Lecoq snapped, "I can walk."

"But you came alone, *maître*?"

"Boucher offered to escort me. If I had needed help, I wouldn't have come. But *voilà*, you see, I am here."

"I am deeply pleased."

Auguste showed Lecoq all his work, ignoring everyone else. He sensed that this was an enormous tax on Lecoq's limited energy but his old teacher refused to halt. Lecoq remembered "The Man That Walks" and was glad it had not been altered. He paused longest before the Hugo monument and observed, "Good. Do they approve? . . . No? Fine. You are on the right track."

"Do you want to rest, *maître*?"

"No, Rodin, no! Soon I will have all of time to rest. I am eighty-seven. Did you know that I was born the same year as Hugo? He was always boasting about his vitality, but I'm still here."

"And will be for a long time yet."

"You never could lie well, Rodin. How is the exhibition going?"

"The guest list is distinguished, but there is much criticism."

"Naturally. At the private view the guest has to prove that though he worships art he detests the artist. Remember, when the criticism grows especially jealous and harsh, that pre-eminent ability is the sin our contemporaries can't forgive."

"Merci."

Lecoq said with satisfaction, "You and Monet will do more to bring down the Salon and the Institute than all the shots I fired. You will end by being invited everywhere."

Auguste was sceptical but too pleased with Lecoq's presence to argue. Then suddenly Lecoq was very weary. Auguste escorted him to the door and put him into a carriage, not noticing that the President was leaving. Later, Proust reproached him for having neglected the President.

"Neglected?" Auguste was indignant. "He was impolite!"

"It doesn't matter," interrupted Monet. "Now Carnot won't buy any work. Come, a few of us are having drinks at the back."

The few turned out to be Renoir, Cézanne, Degas, Eugène Carrière, the painter, and Boucher.

Rodin muttered that the private view was a failure, very few people had really looked at the work. Proust cried, "A failure? Why, you attracted the most distinguished list for years! You outdid the Salon, this exhibit is a front-page story. And despite your bad manners, Rodin, you will be nominated Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur."

Stunned, Auguste could say only, "Like Manet!"

"Yes. But first we want your permission. You will be nominated, too, Monet."

"I refuse," said Monet. "It is too late."

Cézanne said, "I would accept, Monsieur Rodin. It is recognition for all your struggles. But what about Renoir, Proust? He should be nominated too."

"He will be. That is, if he will accept."

"I accept." Renoir smiled. "I am not as proud as Monet."

"And you, Rodin?" asked Proust. "We are showing pieces of yours and of Monet's at the Exposition after this exhibit is over."

"So now I am a French artist? And not obscene?"

"You are the first sculptor of Paris."

Degas, who had refused the honour several times, said, "I wouldn't take it if the Pope offered it to me. This desire for official approval is a disease that will destroy all of us."

Carrière said softly, "I would take it. It is a great honour. And, Auguste, you deserve it."

"Thank you, *mon ami*. And you, too, Cézanne. Eventually you will get it," Rodin said.

Cézanne blurted out, "No, not I, they would feel they were going too far. But I would like official recognition, just once, so people would know I am alive."

CAMILLE, who had made a scene because Auguste had not invited her to the exhibition, was nevertheless gratified by his Legion of Honour. But it was Rose who sewed the red ribbon on the lapel of his frock-coat. She was proud, and for a time stopped feeling sorry for herself. Camille was pacified when Auguste asked her to help him choose pieces for the Exposition.

He had settled into what he considered a permanent situation with Camille and Rose. He thought both women should be content with the arrangement, yet whenever he set foot in either's house he felt on enemy territory. He was absorbed in sculpture, and the number of evenings Camille spent alone increased.

Meanwhile, at the gloomy house in the rue des Grands Augustins, Rose tried to pretend that part of Auguste was better than none. But he never invited her to go out with him on the occasions when he wore the red ribbon, and she feared that he would never keep his promise to Papa. If *le bon Dieu* didn't perform a miracle soon, it would be too late. Rose knew her love was indestructible, but life wasn't.

He remembered her birthday, had dinner with her, and gave her a hundred francs, telling her to buy herself a new dress. "But don't get extravagant," he warned her. "We're still as poor as we ever were."

"With all the studios?"

He gazed at her sadly. Poor Rose, she didn't have the slightest idea of his needs.

Some days later, Antonin Proust came to Rodin's studio in the rue de l'Université to tell him that the Commissioner of Public Works, representing the city of Paris, had refused the Hugo statue for the Panthéon on the grounds that it was too naked.

"An unclothed 'Hugo' is shameful?" cried Auguste. He pointed to the plaster cast. "Look: his torso is as flat, as hard as a rock, his body the essence of strength. Hugo would be pleased."

"*Cher maître*, I am battling to get you a second chance."

"A second chance?" Auguste was deeply offended.

"There is talk again of asking you for the money back if 'The Gates' aren't delivered soon. But I have a proposal that should satisfy everybody. Clothe 'Hugo,' then the Ministry will be more patient about 'The Gates.'"

"I'll drape him round the waist. But no more."

"That's not enough. Please, *maître*. There is talk of commissioning Dalou."

"To do the Hugo monument?" Auguste was shaken.

"It is possible. Dalou cultivates officials, he has friends at the Beaux Arts—but I am sure you can find a new concept for the Panthéon. I can persuade the Ministry to wait a little—but it is difficult enough, with 'The Gates.'"

"The Gates!" How could he explain that no matter how many figures he modelled, he required more? His conception of hell had been immense to begin with, and as he grew older it became enormous. To be a state sculptor one had to be a slave, he thought bitterly, and also have relatives in the bureaucracy. He should never have taken these commissions, but should have remained obscure, responsible to no one but himself. He picked up an iron bar to smash the Hugo monument, crying, "You want Hugo altered, this is the quickest way!"

"No, no, Auguste!" Proust seized the bar. "You will only help Dalou."

Rodin's flash of fierce strength was gone. He said, "I will think over what you suggested."

A few days later, negotiations began with the Ministry for two monuments, a new, fully clothed "Hugo" for the Panthéon and the old "Hugo"—partly draped—for the Luxembourg Gardens. Rodin had no feeling for a clothed "Hugo"; however, he produced one that was fully recognizable. The Commissioner of Public Works approved the working model, and sent him 1,000 francs as an expression of their good faith. The Ministry of Fine Arts also gave him another, even larger, state studio in the rue de l'Université. It struck Auguste that this studio was a bribe to keep him submissive—but a studio was the one thing he could not resist.

HE WAS working on the "Hugo" in his new studio when Camille stormed in. It was almost midnight. He had forgotten that he had promised to meet her at their studio at the place d'Italie—but to him that did not justify her fury. He had become involved in his work and she should understand. He stood beside the plaster cast, which he had clothed in a flowing cape and large-brimmed hat, and gripped his chisel. In the fitful light of the candles his face was in deep shadow, his eyes burnt.

She announced angrily, "I'm leaving you."

He looked incredulous. Then he said scornfully, "If you want to desert me when the ship is sinking, I cannot stop you."

"For ten years you have held me in a vice."

"Eight. And the vice is of your own making."

"No passion can last without fulfilment."

"Go if you wish."

He turned back to the "Hugo."

Camille had expected him to plead with her. She wavered.

He said, "I made you no promises. You know my work is my life." He changed the subject abruptly.

"Do you like this 'Hugo?' "

"No." She had not even looked.

"This damned 'Hugo' is destroying me!"

She longed to console him, then thought: No, this was another of his traps. She started for the door, wishing it didn't hurt so much. "I'll leave the key with the concierge."

Her voice was soft, and he came to her and said in his gentlest way, "I'm sorry I kept you waiting. It was wrong of me."

She was moved by his tenderness. He looked more depressed than she had ever seen him; then, with a burst of energy, he said, "I have been offered a commission to do a statue of Balzac, to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of his birth."

"You said you would never do another public commission."

"This is for the Société des Gens des Lettres de France—our leading group of writers. Balzac was a founder. Their president, Zola, has recommended me. Should I take the Balzac?"

"You want to take it, don't you, Auguste?"

"Want to!" It was frightening how much he wanted to. "No writer appeals to me more—not Hugo, nor Flaubert, nor Zola nor Daudet. Balzac wrote about a world I knew, that I could have grown up in. He died when I was only nine, I discovered him a few years later, thanks to Lecoq, and I began to understand what Lecoq meant when he said, 'Do not invent, observe.' No one observed better than Balzac. *La Comédie Humaine* became my Bible." Auguste's excitement changed to sadness. "But they will never allow me to make Balzac as he really was, more interesting and dramatic than any of his characters. He was obese, with a protruding stomach and short, stubby legs, thick lips and ugly large features. He was gross yet full of sensibility, enormously complicated and difficult. It would be insane to attempt this commission, and yet——" His eyes lit up with a brilliant gleam. "Camille, if I take it, I will need all the faith I can muster. You cannot leave me now." He embraced her, kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her mouth. "We mustn't quarrel. I need you as my first assistant."

She stood stiffly, though she yearned to respond. Give him up, a voice cried within her. He is pitiless, he cares only for sculpture.

He said, "I can't do without you."

Give him up, the voice repeated, give him up. "Will you leave Rose?" she asked.

"I will move her to the country," he said. "As soon as I find a house. Then we can concentrate on the 'Balzac.' "

He was a fundamental element, like Balzac, she thought; his was the magnificent energy of Nature.

"And if you like, *chérie*, we can go to Tours, to Balzac's birthplace," he said. "It will be a holiday for both of us."

"A kind of honeymoon?"

"In a way. We will think only of ourselves and Balzac."

Camille said, "Let us go as soon as we can."

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RODIN accepted the Balzac commission. In return for 30,000 francs —10,000 to be paid in advance—he agreed to complete the statue in eighteen months, a statue ten feet high on a pedestal, for the place du Palais Royal. Every time Camille asked him about the trip to Tours he cried harshly, "Later, later!"

Eighteen months was not enough. The more he studied Balzac, the more he realized the vast task ahead of him. Moreover, he had to revise the "Hugo" again, and make some changes in "The Burghers." The Balzac gave him such energy that he wanted to work on all his sculpture at once.

He added new figures to "The Gates," and took several private commissions for portrait busts to pay for the trip to Tours and the move to the country.

Camille, after waiting months for Auguste to keep his promises, went to bed with nervous exhaustion. He sat by her side in the studio at the place d'Italie, as she lay with her head turned to the wall, acting as if she wanted to die. She refused to talk, to eat, to sleep, to do anything but lie there, until he finally made arrangements to go to Tours. He informed Rose that he was visiting Tours for a week or two to study Balzac's birthplace.

CAMILLE found herself in a large bedroom in an old provincial inn on the outskirts of Tours. The furnishings were shabby, the curtains faded, and the metal bed creaked at the slightest touch. But Rodin was satisfied; the window gave a good light so that he could sketch.

He had registered them as M. and Mme. Nerac, of Paris. "To observe the proprieties," he told her.

But before she could take off the stylish flowered hat she had purchased for the occasion, and settle into his arms, he insisted they visit Balzac's birthplace.

Wondering if *he* would ever consider *her*, she followed him down a narrow, winding staircase and into a feudal courtyard. He paused there to point out that the inn was in the style of Louis XIV. She thought: The architecture doesn't matter a damn if he won't marry me. But she said, "Auguste, it is lovely!"

He led her through narrow alleys and medieval streets to the small house where Balzac had been born. They were disappointed; it was without distinction, and they went on to the public square where they saw statues of Rabelais and Descartes, but none of Balzac. Auguste asked passers-by if there was a statue of Balzac in Tours, but they didn't know what he was talking about, they had never heard of Balzac.

But Auguste and Camille loved Tours. The rest of the day they strolled about the town and the countryside. The sun was warm and bright. The land was a profusion of gardens and vineyards, dazzling flowers and shining green fields. Bathed by the splendid sun and the tranquil air, they paused before a château with beautiful medieval arches, soaring buttresses, and façades adorned with delicate and subtle sculpture.

Rodin was enchanted by the skill of these anonymous medieval sculptors. They gave him a new buoyancy. I love him, thought Camille, when he is like this.

That evening she put on a lovely white silk night-gown that she had been saving for this occasion. He wanted her to take it off so he could sketch her.

She was furious, but when he said, "You move so gracefully when you are naked," she laughed and said, "Can't you ever stop being a sculptor?"

She came to him swiftly and perched on his lap in the pose he wished for the unfinished pairing he had named "The Kiss." But he could not draw her now. She was kissing him with warm delight, and he could not resist her. That night was the most passionate of their lives.

Camille was so happy she did not dare risk this joy by suggesting marriage. Here in the gardenland of France the disasters of state commissions and the fear of difficulties to come vanished. Auguste, who had felt old in Paris, vibrated with the vitality of youth. Camille prayed that their joy would never end.

THEY returned to Paris a month after they had left. Auguste had stayed twice as long as he had intended, but it had been worth it. He left Camille at the place d'Italie, promising to be back that night.

Before going home he stopped off at his main studio in the rue de l'Université, and learned that Rose had been there demanding to know whether they had heard from him. When he got home, he was in a temper. Rose matched his shouting, until he thought he would go out of his mind. She announced that she was leaving. He had said he would be away for a week or two, and he had stayed away four.

He had an impulse to let her go and be done with her for ever. But what would she do without him? He turned away, and she shouted, "Where are you going now?"

"You don't want me. Scold, scold, no wonder I don't want to come home. I won't stand it." He had reached the door.

She knew she should let him leave, but where would she go? She started to cry, and when he put his arms round her consolingly, her anger dissolved.

He put her to bed, saying, "Rose, you are tired and nervous. You need rest and country air." She appreciated his solicitude as he tucked her under a quilt and made sure she was comfortable. He stayed with her that night. He could not leave her, she looked so helpless. Camille would understand.

Camille did not understand. But she was appeased when Auguste said that he was moving Rose to the country immediately. He found a house in Bellevue, a suburb of Paris, and assured Camille that she would have all of him—when he was in Paris.

The day of the moving Auguste stood outside the ancient, draughty house in the rue des Grands Augustins and felt as if a vital part of his life was ending. Always, except for the years in Belgium, he had lived in this part of the city and now he felt pulled one way by his love of Nature, the other by his love of Paris.

The painter Carrière, who had become a close friend, supervised the movers and Auguste recalled the day his rebellious young friends had been the movers. The memory made him sad. So much had changed. Fantin was a recluse, barricaded in his studio; Degas, troubled by worsening vision, had become even more misanthropic, and said he would never exhibit again. Renoir, crippled with rheumatism, was living in the south of France; while Dalou was Rodin's most savage competitor and they were no longer speaking to each other.

He was fortunate to have Carrière for a friend, Auguste reflected. The square-faced painter, with his thick moustache and gentle brown eyes, was without malice in a malicious world. He was very poor, and had an ailing wife and five young children. But when he got a patron, he generously introduced him to other artists; and he exhibited his friends' work in his own studio.

Rose stood in the doorway, holding in her arms Rodin's statuette of her with the infant Auguste. She was smiling, pleased with Auguste's consideration in moving to the country. She had never really cared for this house.

Rodin introduced her to Carrière as "Madame Rose," and said to her, "You will like Bellevue, *ma chatte*."

Carrière said, "It is on a hill with a fine view of Paris."

"I'm sure I will love it," she said. Auguste had at last introduced her to one of his artist friends!

The house at Bellevue had three floors, many rooms and abundant sunlight. It was beautifully situated, overlooking Paris and the Seine, and surrounded by meadows and orchards. Rose liked the countryside, and Auguste seemed so pleased with Bellevue that she was sure he would be home often. Her enthusiasm gratified him. He felt he had made the ideal compromise.

NOW THE call went out: *Maître* Rodin was looking for a model for Balzac. His assistants scoured Paris for fat-bellied, short, stubby-legged models. None of the models they found satisfied him, but he kept some of them, for an arm, a leg, a torso. After he had designed seventeen clay versions of Balzac, all standing and all nude, he called in his assistants: the intense, diminutive Antoine Bourdelle, the soft-spoken Aristide Maillol, later to be a world-famous sculptor, and Camille. They viewed the figures with caution. One ill-advised word could infuriate the *maître*, yet intelligent criticism—no matter how severe—could bring a nod of approval.

The seventeen "Balzacs" stood on their temporary bases. Contrary to his usual custom, Auguste had not made his first figures one-third or one-half the final size, but had done them to the specifications of the monument. The studio was so crowded there was barely room to move.

He said deprecatingly, "These are just first drafts."

Bourdelle, usually the leader, pointed to the Balzac standing astride a huge, thick tree trunk, as if being born from it, arms akimbo, belly projecting, the legs very thick and short but powerful, and said, "This looks the most developed, *maître*."

Maillol said hesitantly, "I like the satyr. Balzac was a little of a satyr, I believe."

Auguste turned to Camille. "Which do you prefer?"

"Each has its own quality," she said.

He was not satisfied with any of the figures, he knew suddenly, and his assistants were not either. He could tell by the way they had to be prodded to volunteer an opinion.

He studied the figures all that night, and by dawn he had discarded ten of them. He summoned Camille to help him decide which figure to concentrate on. She asked, "Which one do you like?"

He pointed to the Balzac growing naked out of a tree trunk.

"Then do it. You always tell me to follow my own instincts."

He did, and found himself doing many variations of this Balzac. Months passed and there was no income, for he did nothing else. The 10,000-franc advance dwindled. He had to express Balzac's enormous energy—that was the secret, Balzac's energy!

WHEN the "Balzac" was not delivered at the end of eighteen months, the Société des Gens des Lettres informed him that he was in breach of contract. If the statue was not delivered at once, they would demand the return of the 10,000 francs.

Angrily, Auguste demanded an extension and the Société said they must see his "Balzac" first. He was indignant but he wrote politely that he would be pleased to show them the finished work. So he was irate when a committee of five, headed by Émile Zola, surprised him in his studio.

Zola introduced the oddly assorted jury: André Cholet, a playwright; the hawk-faced Victor Pisne, a noted military historian; Robert Berard, a third-rate writer; and Henri Rieu, a biographer.

They were all shocked by the figure, even Zola. Cholet exclaimed, "His belly!"

Pisne said, "All you have represented in this figure is the Balzac of *Contes Drolatiques*, a Rabelaisian figure. It is revolting."

Zola was offended by this. "Pisne, you are being silly."

Pisne retorted, "Do you want this naked Balzac to stand at the place du Palais Royal with the Société's name on it?"

"This is not the final Balzac," Auguste said. "I may clothe him when I get the body right. Zola, would you invite this committee to judge your unfinished book?"

"I would give you free rein, but I won't be president of the Société much longer. How much more time do you need?"

"Give me six months."

Zola nodded assent, but Pisne said, "He will never finish. The sooner we cancel the contract, the better." The others, however, accepted Zola's judgment.

Six months later Zola's term ended, and the "Balzac" was not ready. A storm was about to break, and Proust, Boucher and Mallarmé entered Auguste's studio with trepidation. Rodin's eyes were blood-shot from lack of sleep, there was grey in his red beard, his thick hair was heavy with dust, and he was wearing a houppelande, a sort of cloak resembling Balzac's Dominican writing robe. He covered the figure to prevent them from seeing it.

Proust said, "*Mon cher ami*, we've come as mediators for the Société and because we are your friends." He went on to explain that Pisne now controlled the Société.

Auguste began to roll balls of clay in his large palms, and in an instant had a fist. The fingers were tightly clenched, their severe curl showing deep anger.

Proust went on, "Pisne got the Société to pass a resolution that you must deliver the 'Balzac' within twenty-four hours or they will force you to return the ten thousand francs, with damages."

"And you are doing the devil's work," Auguste said scornfully.

Mallarmé said softly, "We got them to extend the time to a month."

Auguste respected Mallarmé, who had never compromised his poetry despite the violent attacks that had been made against it.

"What do you advise, Mallarmé?" he asked.

"Try to give them a working model, if you can."

"Within a month?"

Boucher said, "And if you would clothe him——"

Auguste interrupted. "And make him handsome, a superman."

"A little of that would help."

"No," Auguste said decisively. "Balzac was a great writer but he

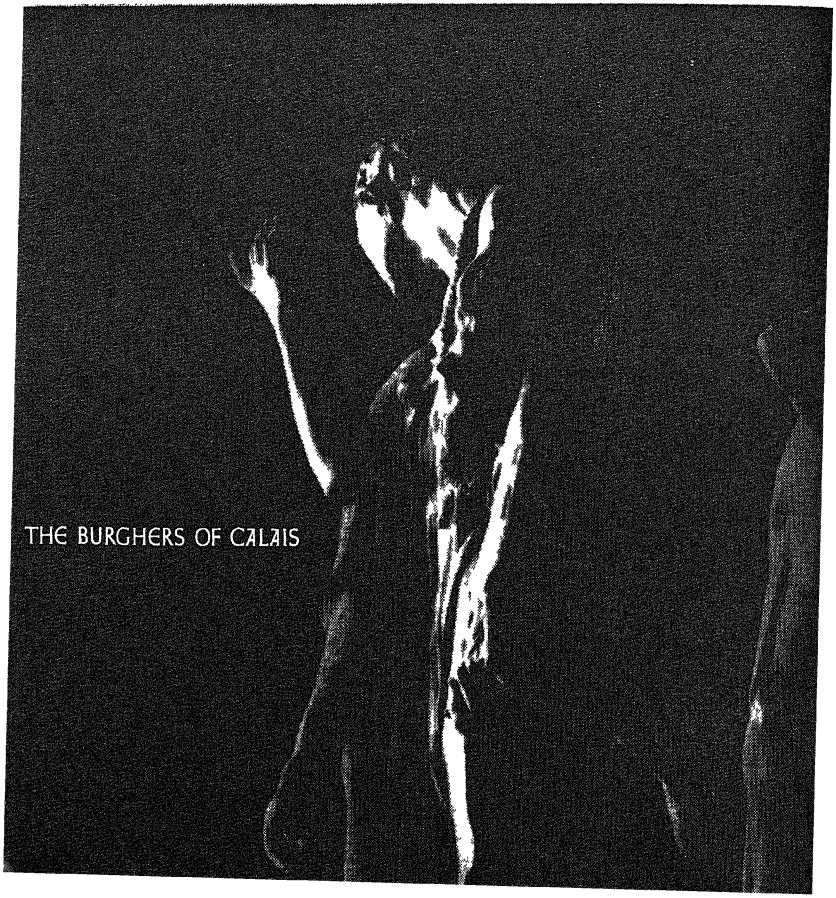
was also human. I will fulfil the contract by giving them the best 'Balzac,' not the quickest."

Proust asked, "But when will it be done?"

"I don't know."

A silence followed. Then Mallarmé said, "We will ask the Société to give you another year, maybe two." The others agreed, and for an instant everyone smiled. But Proust, always the official, asked, "What will you do, Auguste, if the Société does not give in?"

"What I learned a long time ago. Never hope. And do not hurry."



BALZAC had spent most of his life in Paris, and now Auguste strode off towards Passy and the rue Raynouard where he had lived. The house where Balzac had spent his days dodging creditors, and his nights writing feverishly to pay them, was in a run-down neighbourhood in the old Paris that Balzac had written about, with narrow, winding lanes, heavy cobbles and ancient trees.

Auguste wandered through the streets as Balzac must have done many times when he was exhausted and even the endless pots of coffee had not helped. Energy returned to Auguste then. He smiled at the



vision of the stout Balzac in his Dominican gown, hurrying out of the back door in to the rue Berton when his creditors had rung the front doorbell in the rue Raynouard. Perhaps this was what his "Balzac" needed, a flowing Dominican robe from head to toe.

THE Ministry of the Interior was having a national lottery at one franc a ticket to raise 45,000 francs to cast "The Burghers" in bronze and to erect the group in Calais. Proust told Auguste about it, standing before "The Burghers," which had been moved back to the studio. "The prizes will be wines, slippers, baskets, soap, lamps, all sorts of odds and ends. Everybody in France will contribute. Your name will be all over the country."

"On every kiosk," Auguste said. "I've seen the posters—they make 'The Burghers' sound like an act at the Moulin Rouge."

But the lottery was a success, and on June 3, 1895, "The Burghers" was dedicated in Calais. Auguste sat with Carrière on the platform, and wished it didn't hide the group from the growing crowd. He was unhappy about the position of "The Burghers"—he had wanted it before the ancient Town Hall, but the city had insisted on putting it in front of a new public park. He had intended "The Burghers" to be placed just a foot above the ground, but the Municipal Council had put it on a five-foot pedestal, and he was displeased with the ornamental grille that they had built round the group.

Calais was treating him with respect, and had made him an honorary citizen, but, sitting remote on the platform, he could not tell what the townspeople felt. They were chiefly family groups, the children hushed to silence and looking bored. He longed to explain the burghers to the children; he felt that the officials, with all their pomp, were destroying the children's interest. When the glowing words of appreciation ended, a strange silence fell on the crowd. It was as though no one wanted to disturb the ghosts of their former citizens. But as Auguste left the platform and blended into the crowd he realized it was something more.

The citizens of Calais regarded this group as their own. The burghers were simple, plain men, whom they understood and knew, as they knew themselves. Yet each burgher was lonely and apart, each given life by his own expression and attitude. And as the crowd pressed closer,

hushed and intent, the burghers became fellow citizens who were suffering, yet would endure, who expected to be crucified, yet had come to that of their own free will.

A curious child reached out to touch the leader, Eustache de Saint-Pierre, to see if he was real, and could not because of the grille. Auguste longed to embrace the child. But he was even more moved when a child climbed over the grille and on to the base, gazed into the eyes of the burghers, and began to cry.

And as he walked towards the group, the crowd parted to allow him to pass. No one said a word. He stood before "The Burghers" and felt the regard and respect of these people. In this moment they were all part of a whole: they were French, and proud of it; and something more, part of the human race.

Auguste's reverie was shattered by the screech of a train whistle. The train to Paris was waiting for him, he realized. He was pleased and touched when Carrière said, as they hurried to the railway station in the mayor's carriage, "One has to see 'The Burghers' in the open to realize what you have done, that you have planted their roots in our earth."

ONE JUNE Sunday Auguste was working in his studio in the rue de l'Université when his half sister, Clotilde, appeared in the doorway. He would not have recognized her if she had not told him who she was. Not a trace of the very pretty girl remained; she had become a hag. She was thickly rouged, her hair was not her own. She wore a hideous zebra-striped hobble skirt. He was sad, remembering her once beautiful complexion and black hair.

And while he was still trying to hide his shock, she blurted out, "I saw your name on a kiosk near the place du Carrousel, in big letters—an advertisement for a lottery. At first I couldn't believe it was you, then I remembered that as a little boy you liked to draw, so I took a couple of tickets. They were only a franc apiece."

Still startled, he didn't ask her what she had been doing. Whatever it was, it had not been good for her.

"Oh, I know it's a surprise," she said. "I've had a hard time. I've been in St. Lazare prison. Several times."

So Papa had been right, he thought sorrowfully. "I'm sorry."

"Papa predicted it, didn't he? But if Gaston hadn't deserted me——" She shrugged. "It's too late now. How's Marie?"

"Dead. She died soon after you left." And though it was a long time ago, his eyes misted.

"She tried to keep in touch with me, but we lost track"

"Yes." He could remember Marie's small oval face, her reddish blonde hair, her simple dark dresses with white collars, and her love of lace, but then they could not afford lace. A lump came to his throat.

"And Mama?"

"She died when I was in Belgium, twenty-four years ago."

"You won't mind if I visit her grave?"

"There is no grave. They had no money when she died, and it was just after the Commune. Do you want to see Papa's?"

"No." She paused, then asked, "Do you have a family?"

"None that I want to talk about."

For the first time she gazed at the studio and the sculpture that filled it. "Are you truly so successful now, my little brother Auguste?"

"People order my sculpture, but I'm still in debt."

"How much money do you have?"

He answered abruptly, "How much money do *you* have?"

"Ten centimes." She said suddenly, "You think I'm no good."

"Of course I don't." He handed her forty francs, all that he had in his pocket. He said, "Come again if you need help." He had a feeling that she wouldn't.

She asked, "Is Aunt Thérèse alive? I liked Aunt Thérèse."

He felt guilty. He hadn't seen his aunt for a long time. He said, "She is alive. But not well."

"Don't tell her that you saw me. She would want to help me, and I don't need help, not a sou. I'll return your francs. Soon. You'll see."

They exchanged *bonjours*. He watched her walk away defiantly, though age and fatigue lay heavily upon her. Her last sight of him was of a stocky, wide-shouldered man whose thick red beard and heavy hair were turning grey, but whose hands were lively, remodelling a huge clay head with an authority that amazed her.

The next Sunday Auguste went to see Aunt Thérèse in the working-class district where she was living with one of her sons. He entered her

house with apprehension. Aunt Thérèse was nearing eighty; she had been ill often the past few years, and he expected to find a bedridden invalid. Indeed, she seemed to have shrunk to half the size he remembered, her face was deeply lined, her hair completely white, but she rose out of her rocking-chair the instant she saw him, and proudly insisted on serving him wine, coffee and croissants. She knew about his work; pasted on the walls of her living-room were newspaper articles describing his achievements. But family was her chief concern. She was afraid that he had come to tell her about a new woman, another child. When he assured her that he was still living with Rose, she sighed with relief. She said she was disappointed that Rose never visited her any more. He didn't tell her that he had forbidden it, fearful that Rose would talk about Camille.

Aunt Thérèse asked, "How is Rose? And the boy?"

Auguste assured her, "Well. Aunt Thérèse, do you need any help?"

She said tartly, "I'm past that." Then her tone softened, "You ought to legitimize the boy, Auguste."

Colour deepened in Auguste's cheeks, but he did not retort angrily, for he saw how proudly she wore her wedding ring—achieved finally, long after her three boys had grown up.

She said, "You won't desert them? Rose is a good woman."

"She doesn't have to worry. I said I would take care of her."

"Is that all?" There was a moment of silence, and then she came to his side as she had done when he was a child. She clung to him with emotion and he recalled how she had always defended him. He embraced her, an expression of feeling rare for him, and said, "I will do as I promised Papa."

That evening he suggested to Rose that she visit Aunt Thérèse. Rose was delighted.

Petit Auguste had not stayed long in the army. When Auguste told Rose that he wanted to bring the boy back into the studio, she was happier than she had been for a long time. She said, "Don't be too hard on him, Auguste, he's had some difficult times," and he surprised her by not resenting that, saying, "We've all had hard times, *ma chatte*, especially Aunt Thérèse. Don't say anything that would upset her." And Rose promised to be cheerful.

A week later Rodin visited *petit* Auguste. He found the young man unshaven, almost in rags, living in a hut in Montmartre. He didn't invite his father in.

Rodin said, "Would you like to return to the studio?"

Petit Auguste was surprised. He said, "It depends."

"On what?" Auguste's voice sharpened a little.

"On what I am to do. Sweeping, cleaning, being a concierge?"

"I need a good secretary. But you would have to shave, comb your hair, wear clean clothes, stop playing the bohemian."

"And be your son?"

Was *petit* Auguste taunting him? Rodin said, "You are my son. There's no doubt about that."

"But have you acknowledged that? I want the name Rodin, not Beuret, Mama's name. Why haven't you legitimized me?"

There was a heavy silence. Rodin felt in a dilemma. He asked himself: Is it that I have been ashamed of him, because the boy hasn't been even a competent workman? Or is it because I don't want to make this final commitment, to make him my heir? He said, "Come back to the studio, and we shall see what we shall see. If you can't be a secretary, we will find something else."

"It isn't a question of can't," *petit* Auguste said with sudden pride, looking very much like his father, with his prominent nose and wide, sloping forehead. "But of what I want. You have never considered that, have you?"

"I, I, I! Is that all you are interested in?"

"Aren't you?"

The realization that he was behaving like Papa made Rodin shudder. He said, "We will try to find something in the studio that you would like to do."

"What about my name?"

"If you set such value to it, you should be willing to work for it."

The *maître* was a shrewd one, the young man thought admiringly. One would have to be smart to get the best of him. He said, "I'll try."

"And I'll try to act like a father. But I'll need a little help. Yes?" They shook hands on that. Then abruptly Auguste lunged forward and kissed his son on both cheeks. And he handed him 100 francs to

buy new clothes, but only after *petit* Auguste had promised to be at the studio the next morning.

Petit Auguste appeared several days later. He did not offer any explanation for the delay, but he looked clean and tidy in new clothes. He said that he would like to supervise the purchase and distribution of materials and Rodin liked the idea of his son assuming this responsibility.

THE SOCIÉTÉ had given Auguste another year to finish the "Balzac" because of the applause for "The Burghers," but again the year passed and there was no completed "Balzac" or "Hugo." He did new versions of each figure, but none satisfied him. And to pay for this work—long ago he had spent the advances for these commissions—he took new work. As he was fond of repeating to Proust, "I must take the private commissions to afford the public ones."

He also did work for his own pleasure. Camille reproached him for attempting so much, but inwardly she was proud of him. She thought his "Crouching Woman" and "The Old Courtesan," which he had done with Clotilde in mind, were dramatic and touching. His Orpheus and Eurydice, Adonis and Venus, Cupid and Psyche were lyrical and tender.

He did a noble helmeted head of Camille which he called "France," and she finally gave in to his repeated pleas and agreed to pose for the female figure of "The Kiss"—the male figure to be done from memory.

Cholet, his best friend in the Société, persuaded him that the "Hugo" must be shown in the Salon of 1897. But Rodin flatly refused to have the "Balzac" ready.

At this Salon, which included works of the painter Chavannes, Carrière and Auguste, he showed a seated, clothed "Hugo." And he knew it was a disaster. He wanted to flee, but Camille joined him, thanking him for showing some of her own sculpture. Auguste thought bitterly: In compromising I lost whatever strength the original "Hugo" possessed and gained nothing.

He was actually relieved when the Ministry of Fine Arts informed him that this "Hugo" was not suitable for the Panthéon or the Luxembourg, but they appreciated his efforts to please them and said they

would allow him more time. He was too tired to be grateful for what Camille called "your reprieve." She was happy because, as a result of the Salon, she had sold several heads, and her work had been favourably reviewed. Auguste was pleased for her.

But she was shocked when he informed her a few weeks later that he was moving from Bellevue to Meudon, farther out from Paris. He had borrowed 40,000 francs to buy a country house with several acres of grounds.

Petit Auguste was absenting himself from the rue de l'Université again. This time it was a week before he appeared. Rodin was angry when he received bills for wine signed *Auguste Rodin* by his son. But when the boy returned, Auguste said only, "Your mother and I would like you to live with us at Meudon. We are living in the main house, the Villa des Brillants, and there is a nice cottage for you."

"*Merci, maître*, but—what about my name? You promised."

"I said I would see how you behaved. What about these wine bills signed *Auguste Rodin*?"

Petit Auguste shrugged. It was easy to arrange in Paris; all the shopkeepers knew that Rodin was his father. He said he would pay the bills later.

And now there was a fierce, hopeless quarrel: Auguste swore that *petit* Auguste must live at Meudon, and *petit* Auguste cried that he could not live any longer as a bastard. Neither listened to the other until the boy suddenly shouted, "I have a message for you! Somebody was here from the Société, with an ultimatum! They were even angrier than you are."

THE ULTIMATUM was: Give the Société the completed "Balzac" at once or return the 10,000 francs.

Auguste heard it the next day when he hurried to the office of the Société. Pisne, the president, delivered it, standing hostile and arrogant, with Cholet behind him.

Auguste pleaded, "Suppose I deposit the ten-thousand-franc advance with the government as an expression of good faith?"

Cholet agreed, but Pisne cried, "Delay, always delay!"

He and Cholet quarrelled violently over Rodin. Cholet threatened to

resign and take many members of the Société with him. "Enough, believe me," Cholet said, "to start a new Société."

The result was that the Société put the "Balzac affair" in the hands of their lawyers, and Cholet resigned, followed by six members, and wrote an eloquent letter to *Le Figaro* explaining why. This was printed on the first page of the newspaper, next to the announcement that the Société was bringing suit against Rodin.

Suddenly the "Balzac affair" was on the front page of all the Parisian newspapers. Protests against the Société by Zola, Mallarmé, Proust, Chavannes, Monet, Carrière, Boucher and Henley were printed in the newspapers. These writers and artists felt that if Rodin was forced to conform to the Société's academic taste they would all be in jeopardy.

Mallarmé approached Auguste as an unofficial mediator. Partly by hinting that Dalou or one of Auguste's own students might get the commission, partly by pointing out that the weight of public opinion would give him one last chance to finish the "Balzac" if he took advantage of it at once, Mallarmé persuaded him to give his word that there would be a "Balzac" in the Salon of 1898. And the Société withdrew its suit.

Auguste discovered that Lecoq had died while he had been fighting over the "Balzac," and he was stricken with gloom. It was no consolation to realize that his old teacher had lived to be ninety-five.

But he resumed work on the "Balzac" with new energy. He sent Camille to the *arrondissement* of Paris where people from Balzac's province, Touraine, had settled. Here she found a butcher with the dimensions of Balzac and features resembling the writer's, and brought Auguste to see him. When Pierre Ralle heard the model's fee was five francs an hour, he thought Auguste was mad, but he wiped the blood of the horse meat he was carving off his thick, strong hands and shook Auguste's hand in agreement.

Rodin took Pierre to an expensive tailor and had him fitted for trousers, waistcoat and a Dominican robe. While he waited for the clothes to be made, he went to work on Pierre nude. To avoid interruption, he rented a new studio in the rue de l'Université—his third in this street and his sixth in Paris. Camille was furious when he closed this new studio to her. He must have absolute privacy while he was

modelling the nude. He added, seeing her anger, "But you may order the materials."

Several days later no material for the "Balzac" had arrived and Auguste was angry with Camille. He went to his main studio, but she was not there. Alarmed, he hurried to their studio at the place d'Italie. He was relieved to find her there—for a dreadful moment he had feared she had left him. But she was more mournful than he had ever seen her. To cheer her, he announced, "I'm completing 'The Kiss.' I'll need you again as a model. I've done the male figure from memory."

The next few weeks, while he continued to pay Pierre, he modelled Camille. He had done many versions of "The Kiss," some that went back to the time he had fallen in love with her, but now it struck him as right for the first time. Her face would be partly hidden; it was her beautiful body that would convey the emotion.

At last it was finished. He gazed at the couple kissing passionately, yet tenderly, then said, "Come here."

Camille moved to his side. She had a sense of physical delight as she examined the lovers. He put his arm round her and said, "They will look fine in marble, *chérie*." She answered his embrace with passion. "The Kiss," he realized, was an expression of their love.

But the "Balzac" had to be more. He was nearing fifty-seven, and this revival of energy might not last much longer.

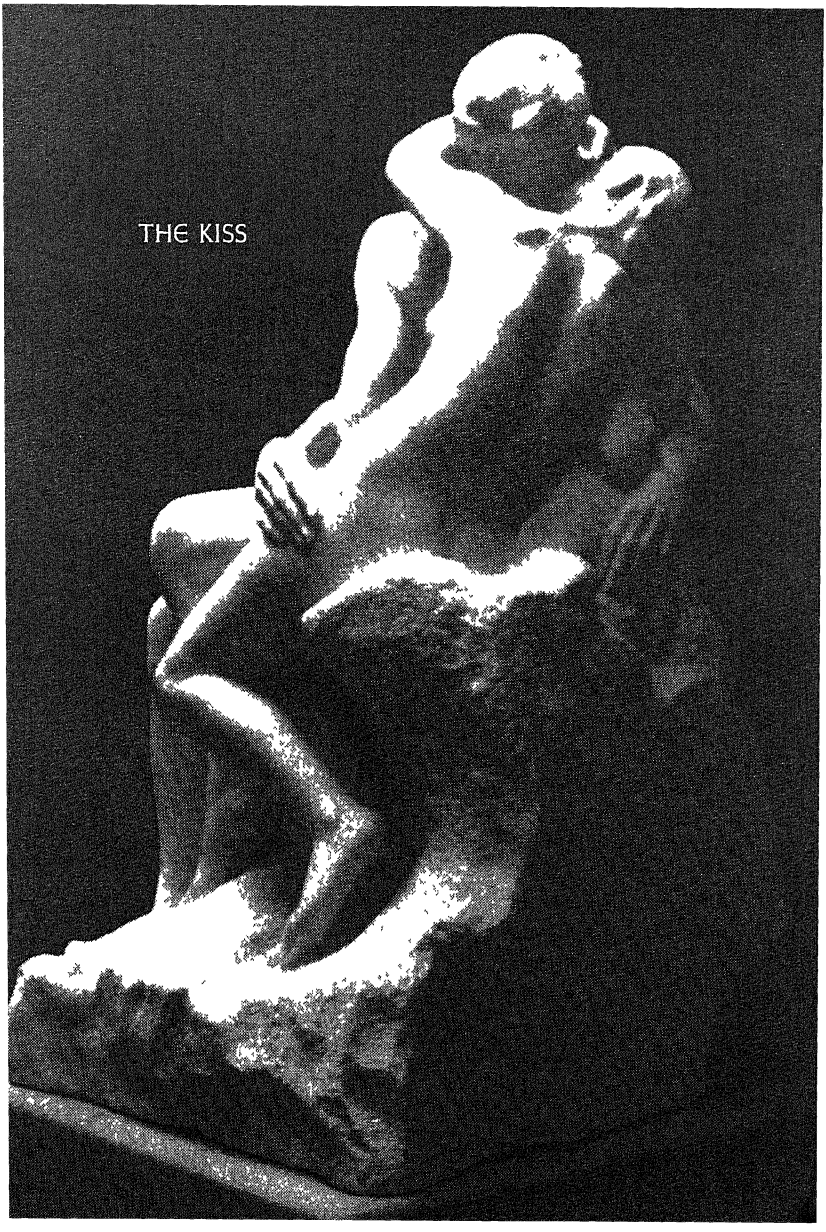
A few weeks before the Salon of 1898, Auguste asked Camille to examine what he had done. She thought the trousers and waistcoat in which he had clothed the figure disappointing; Balzac had lost his power. However, she mumbled, "It is authentic."

"Say what you mean," he demanded.

"It's the clothes, they make him look stuffed. What about this Dominican gown? Why don't you use it?"

He knew she was right. He made her put the gown on Pierre. It covered him from his neck to the tip of his toes. Then Auguste tore down the entire figure and made plans to rebuild it. When she pointed out all the work he was destroying, he retorted, "Seven-eighths of what I do is hidden, like an iceberg."

The completion of the "Balzac" became a dance in which Auguste's hands moved with a fresh swiftness and certitude. The shapeless mass


THE KISS

became feet, then thighs; the torso grew to a masterly climax in the great head and mane of hair like a lion's. And now Auguste's hands subtly interwove the Dominican robe with the figure until they were one. The robe made Balzac magnificent. Auguste placed the figure on a five-foot pedestal, did the final version at double life-size, and had it cast in white plaster. Then he called in his assistants, Camille, Bourdelle and Desbois.

Bourdelle was silent, staring, not at the head as were the others, but at the hands.

Auguste asked, suddenly anxious, "You don't like them?" Bourdelle was his best pupil, an outstanding sculptor.

"Oh, I like them," said Bourdelle. "The head keeps the focus, the drapery creates its own harmony, the hands are powerful, but"

"They are too powerful," said Auguste.

Bourdelle nodded slowly and said, "I believe so."

Auguste walked completely round the "Balzac." Bourdelle was right, he thought sadly, the hands were too dominant. With a sudden gesture he cut them both off. Camille shuddered—weeks of work, and the hands had been superlative.

Auguste asked Bourdelle, "The figure is finished now?"

"It is finished," said Bourdelle.

THE SALON of 1898—the "Balzac salon"—became the thing to see. The scramble for tickets for the private view was frantic. There were other provocative works on exhibit by Besnard, Carrière and Chavannes, but within a few minutes of the opening, several thousand spectators, many of whom had not been invited, jammed into the gallery, and surrounded the "Balzac," "The Kiss" and Rodin.

He stood between his two pieces, striving to look impassive, but his heart was in the "Balzac." Pisne, Cholet and Zola approached him. A crowd formed a circle round them, expecting an explosion.

Pisne suddenly snarled, "This makes me ill!"

Carrière said, "It is a great statue—open your eyes and look at it, Pisne!"

"That snow-man?" Pisne snapped. "That plaster seal? We didn't order it in white plaster or to be clothed in a sack."

Auguste said, "I put it in white plaster because you didn't pay me to cast it in bronze."

"Thank God we didn't waste that money," cried Pisne.

Cholet said, "You don't speak for all of the Société."

Pisne said, "I speak for a majority. Balzac doesn't even have hands! How did he write his books? With his toes, the only part of his body we are allowed to see?"

There was laughter at this gibe, and Pisne, encouraged, rushed on. "I cannot see anything human in this figure. If I met him in the street I would flee. He is revolting, an insult to human dignity. The work has been done by an artisan who despises humanity." Murmurs of agreement rose from the onlookers, and Pisne strode away, his coterie trailing him.

Cholet and Zola tried to console Rodin. Then suddenly they were discussing Alfred Dreyfus.*

Auguste said, "Why is everyone still talking about Dreyfus? Is he really so important?"

Zola said, "They are also discussing Rodin and his 'Balzac.' "

"I wish they weren't," said Auguste.

"And I would have preferred to avoid getting involved with Dreyfus," said Zola, looking old and tired. "But I am."

Auguste said, "He was found guilty. I've done nothing wrong."

"Dreyfus isn't guilty either. Have you signed the petition we are getting up to support him?"

Before Auguste could reply Degas joined a group near by, and Zola and Cholet moved away. Auguste caught Carrière by the arm. "Stay with me, Eugène? Please?" he pleaded.

"I will, but we're all avoiding Degas. He thinks anyone who supports Dreyfus is a traitor. He isn't speaking to Monet or Zola or me. You know Zola has been found guilty of libel because he wrote *J'Accuse!* in defence of Dreyfus. He was sentenced to a year in jail and fined three thousand francs. He is out of jail now because he is appealing, and he is not likely to win, considering the mood of the country."

* Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army, had been convicted—falsely, as it turned out—of passing military secrets to the German Embassy in Paris. Imprisoned for nearly five years on Devil's Island, he was finally exonerated following a public outcry that was touched off by Zola's exposure of the facts in *J'Accuse!*

"I knew that he had been found guilty, but I've been so busy that I've been out of things."

"Threats have been made against Zola's life because he believes Dreyfus is innocent. He is attacking the integrity of the army, of the hierarchy—anything could set off mass hysteria. Zola has great courage coming here today to support the 'Balzac,' which is another unpopular cause."



"I'm grateful."

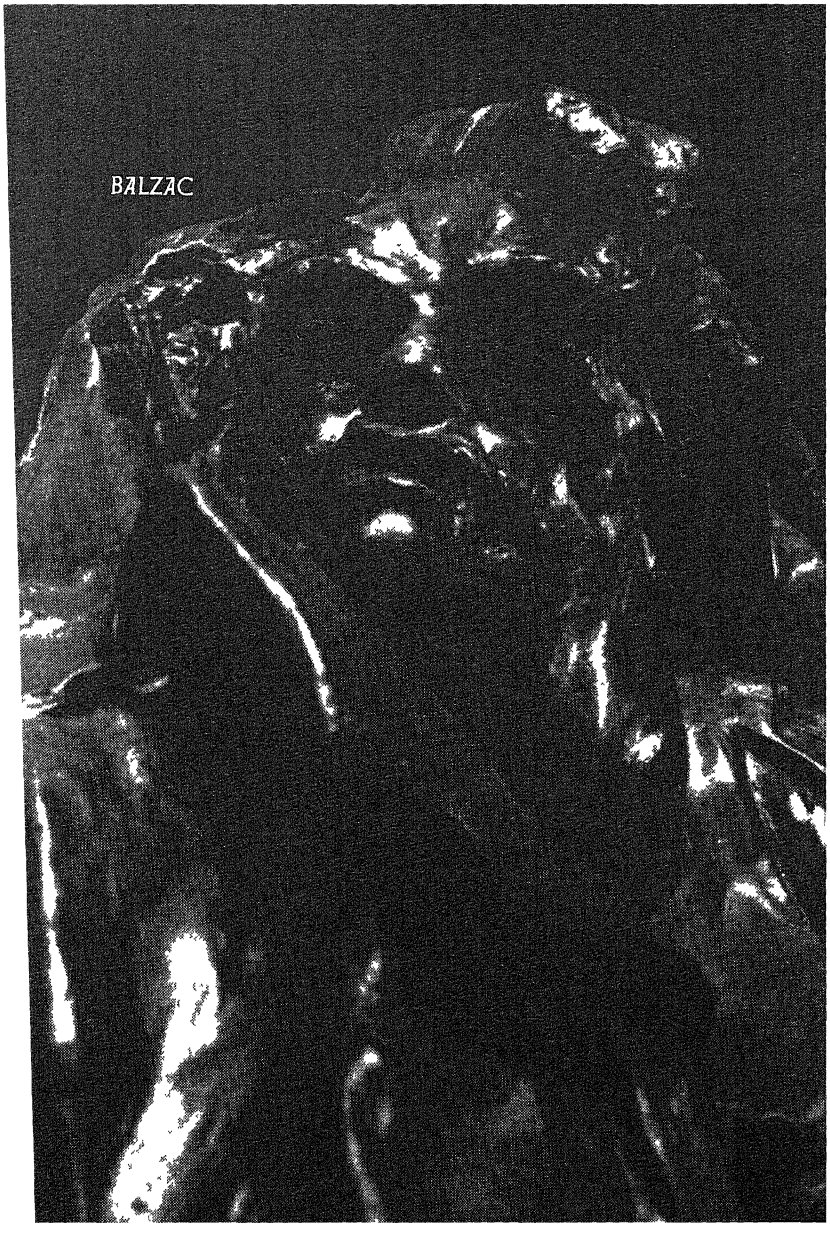
"What about you? Are you going to support Dreyfus?"

"He is probably innocent, but how many battles can I fight? I'm having enough trouble with 'Balzac.' "

They were interrupted by the arrival of Félix Faure, the President of the Republic, and his entourage. A hush fell on the crowd. Auguste bowed to the President. Faure was the perfect politician, he thought. He tried to keep all sides happy. He was for the Société, for Rodin, for the army, for the Dreyfusards, for anybody who could vote.

Everyone was watching as the President told Auguste that "The Kiss" was charming, and ignored the "Balzac." At once a new storm broke. The "Balzac" became the butt of the haters.

THE "Balzac" pushed the Dreyfus affair off the front pages. The criticism in the press was caustic, and all the old gibes about "The Gates" and the "Hugo" were repeated. Rodin could not sleep or work. Friends came to his defence, but the fury spread. Pedlars did a flourishing business selling malicious copies of the figure, toy snow-men, which were obvious mockeries, labelled "Balzac, by Rodin."


BALZAC

The Société voted eleven to four to reject the "Balzac," and a few days later the Paris Municipal Council refused to allow it to be erected anywhere in the city.

Rodin heard the news from Cholet and Carrière at his main studio, in the rue de l'Université, where every day more people were coming to tell him that he must fight back. He was tired, tortured. "I can't take any more fighting," he said.

"We'll do the fighting," Carrière said, and he proudly read a long list of names on a statement denouncing the action of the Société. It included the most distinguished writers, painters, composers and sculptors. Even Georges Clemenceau had signed it.

And a week later Carrière came to tell Auguste that a committee headed by Mallarmé had been formed to raise 30,000 francs to buy the "Balzac," and that they had already raised half the money. Auguste was deeply moved.

Then Clemenceau, one of his strongest supporters, asked Auguste to sign a petition demanding a new trial for Dreyfus. Auguste said, "How can I be involved in a new battle? It takes all my strength to fight for the 'Balzac'!" Clemenceau was deeply offended.

Auguste, whether he liked it or not, was now thoroughly involved in the Dreyfus case, for Clemenceau, Zola and many others who were defending Dreyfus withdrew from the Rodin subscription.

Carrière, though a dedicated Dreyfusard, said to him one day, "This will pass, Auguste. We must save the 'Balzac.' "

Rodin exclaimed in a burst of emotion, "I know I made a mistake, I should have supported Dreyfus! But they expect too much. I'm only one man, one man! I was blind with fatigue!"

Carrière said, "This Dreyfus affair has created such a convulsion that I don't think France will ever be the same. But we have other work to do. There is still fifteen thousand francs in our fund. For everyone who has withdrawn I will get two new members. We must show that there are artists willing to fight for art."

"I am very grateful. But the subscription must end. I'm keeping 'Balzac' myself. My lawyer says I could force the Société to live up to the contract, but I must get back to my work. I'm returning the ten-thousand-franc advance and the interest."

Carrière felt sick. He said desperately, "We could still win, Auguste."

"No, Eugène, no!" He put his arm round Carrière's shoulders. "All I ask of you now is that you give me the list of my friends who have contributed. Their generosity and faith make it possible for me to continue to do sculpture." And with great emotion he kissed Carrière on both cheeks.

AUGUSTE placed the "Balzac" in his garden at Meudon where it stood in ghostly splendour. He was so pleased with it that he decided to have another studio there. And when Camille heard about this, she started to pack.

He was surprised when he came upon her preparing to leave their studio at the place d'Italie. He had spent some days at Meudon placing the "Balzac," then Rose had begged him to stay, and when he had refused she had been difficult and it had taken time to quieten her.

And now it was Camille who was reproaching him. "I have to move. I'm simply a *divertissement* for you, an amusement. We have no private life; your work always comes first, and now so does your housekeeper."

"She is not my housekeeper," he said severely.

"What then? Your mistress?" He did not reply. "If she is your mistress, what am I?"

"You are jealous. That's the trouble."

Her clothes were piled on her trunk, and she looked distraught. Her pulses hammered, she wondered if she was acting insanely. This was a much-lived in, deeply loved studio, book-strewn and crowded with clay and plaster. But his constant absences had driven her to despair. She cried, "We live in different worlds. If I stay it will kill me!"

She resumed her packing.

"Come, *chérie*," he said with emotion. "I'm just a man. You expect too much from me, far too much."

Without heeding her show of indifference, he pulled her close, holding her with his powerful hands. He said, "We will go on a holiday to the South. We'll visit Renoir at Antibes."

She paused, then asked, "Are you still in love with me?"

He kissed her passionately, then said, "Tonight, when I thought you might really leave me, I could not bear it."

She came to him then to be loved. He felt that she yearned to be compelled and subjugated.

He did not return to Meudon to say good-bye to Rose or tell her where he was going or when he would be back. He spent a month taking Camille about the Riviera. Yet this did not satisfy her. She wanted to think of their holiday as a honeymoon, and he thought of it as a walking trip. He was fascinated by the medieval sculpture in the south of France, and her only interest was in marrying him.

When they visited Renoir, who was hospitable and cheerful despite the pain of his rheumatism, Camille did something that puzzled and troubled Auguste. Renoir was showing them his birds, of which he was proud, when Camille suddenly and emotionally threw open the door of a cage, crying, "They should be free!" and would have opened all the cages if Auguste hadn't stopped her.

Renoir was amused, but Auguste scolded Camille after they returned to Nice. She accused him of bullying her, repeating passionately, "Yes, that is what your love is, bullying me, denying me, that's all!" It spoiled the holiday for him.

Back in Paris, however, he felt rested. Now, he told himself, he and Camille were ready to work sixteen hours a day again—that should arouse her from her depression.



Because of the notorious Balzac affair, many people wanted to buy his sculpture. There were offers of new commissions and it looked as if, with hard work and careful supervision of his expenses, he could recoup his losses and even pay back the money he owed the bankers. But he still felt torn apart, for "The Gates" and the Hugo monument remained incomplete. He decided that work was the only solution: he told Bourdelle and Desbois to sell his pieces for whatever they could get, but to put off the new commissions, while he started to work directly on marble at the place d'Italie studio. Camille



was the helper again, getting the materials, the tools, helping but never initiating. Her resentment returned.

After weeks of arduous labour, a great hand rose from a large block of marble. It was as if the marble itself had given birth to the hand. Out of the mighty palm and fingers emerged the interwoven forms of Adam and Eve. Rodin named it "The Hand of God."

It seemed finished to Camille, but he was dissatisfied with the modelling. He decided to stop work for a week to refresh himself, and he assumed that she would not mind his going away as she could then do her own work.

He visited Versailles and Argenteuil, and Monet and Degas, and the one week stretched into several. What delayed him the most was a letter from the English poet Henley, who was despondent over the recent death of his only child. Rodin disliked writing letters, and it took a week of pondering to find words that would console his friend. He finally wrote him an affectionate letter and then returned to the studio at the place d'Italie, quite unprepared for the news that Camille was leaving him.

He stood wrathful in the doorway while she completed her packing. She said, "So Monsieur has returned from Meudon."

"I didn't go to Meudon." She obviously didn't believe him. She was dressed all in black, looking like a funereal bas-relief against the white marble of the "Hand of God." He heard the cry of the vegetable hawker outside, the whistle of the knife-grinder; out there nothing had changed. He didn't know what to say.

She said, "You've become pretty fine with your country home at Meudon. No wonder you don't want me."

"I do want you." He moved towards her, but she evaded him.

"Will you marry me? Leave Rose for good?"

He could not choose. She knew it: she could see it in his tired, self-conscious, constrained expression. But she had to ask, "Why can't you leave her? You don't love her."

"Not the way I love you. I haven't been to Meudon since we took our holiday. Believe me, Camille, I haven't!"

"I believe you." Then, in a voice that made his blood run cold, she said, "For the last time, Auguste, if you won't leave her and marry me, I'm leaving you!"

"I can't abandon her, she's been my lifelong companion, my——"

"Your humble servant!" Camille interrupted explosively, "and I am only a servant too! Oh yes, I am. I am supposed to wait patiently for you no matter where you go, what you do. This is ridiculous, this life I'm living! It's intolerable and unnatural!"

"Unnatural? That's nonsense."

"And selfish. I've sacrificed my career to help yours!"

"But you have been happy here."

Camille stared at Auguste. His eyes, under lids that were thicker than ordinary eyelids, seemed hard. "But you won't marry me." She felt a hopeless grief when he didn't deny that. He was caressing his figure of her in "The Hand of God," and she thought bitterly: Never have I obsessed him as this statue does, as any one of his statues does. His hand continued its slow gentle caress of the marble. And now she felt an extraordinary humiliation in the satisfaction with which he felt the naked "Eve." Never has he shown *me* such tenderness, she said to herself. And I deserve this. I am being punished for loving him more than he loves me.

"I can't go on any longer, Auguste. Not today, not tomorrow, not the day after. Either you marry me or——" He became a blur. She couldn't stop the tears.

"You know I love you. More than anyone I've ever known."

"But I'm not your wife." An overwhelming wave of despair rose in her. She turned away and said, "Very well, I'm leaving."

He did not reply. He held out his hands in a gesture of helplessness, and she turned and rushed out of the studio.

He did not follow her. He looked as pale as death. He wanted to weep; he felt broken with sorrow and dismay. But he would not make promises he could not keep.

Next day the concierge came for her things. And when Rodin heard footsteps in the street the following few days, he hurried to the door, hoping it was Camille. And when it wasn't, he thought despairingly: What have I done to be so unhappy? He worked for a week, and when she did not return, he closed the studio.

AUGUSTE found Rose in the garden when he returned to Meudon. She could tell that he had come to stay, though it had been three months since he had been there. He looked older and she realized that he was almost sixty.

He asked, "How is the garden?"

"Fertile. It's good soil." She took his limp hand, it was cold. A shrewd gleam came into her eyes.

She said, "She's left."

He hesitated, then said, "I'm putting my main studio here." Suddenly he asked, "Is there anything to eat?"

"Fish, boiled meat, cabbage. What you have always liked."

He said, "That's what I like about you, *ma chatte*. Your cooking may not be elegant, but it's what the working-man eats, and it is good. My poor Rose, what you've had to put up with!"

Rose fled to hide her tears, while he muttered, "I would be a fool to give away such wealth."

He turned to the statue of Balzac, standing stark and solitary. He had been right to amputate the hands. Whatever else he had spoiled, he thought, he had not spoiled this. He wondered if he would ever match this work. . . . And now it was all over. Camille was a dream slipping away from him. It was still hard to believe.

Rose returned to say his lunch was ready.

"Think," she said. " 'Balzac' will be here all your life. But he will be in Paris some day, too."

"How can you be sure?" What did she know about it?

"I remember when no one would give two sous for your work. How much did Carrière raise for this?"

He felt a rush of affection and put his arm round her. "*Ma chatte*, you believe in me even when you don't understand me."

"I understand that you've come home," she said, smiling for the first time for many months.

Part VI – "The Thinker"

PARIS was going to celebrate the coming of the twentieth century with its greatest exposition of all: the Exposition Universelle of 1900. Rodin decided to answer his enemies with an exhibit of his collected work. But the Exposition authorities refused to give him space, saying his sculpture did not fit their theme of progress. Finally, with the aid of influential supporters and the financing of the bankers who had helped him to buy Meudon, he got permission to build his own pavilion. It had to be off the fairgrounds, but the situation, in the place de l'Alma, was in the heart of Paris, close to the Arc de Triomphe and within walking distance of the Exposition. He built a simple white structure with Greek columns and placed in it 171 pieces.

The day before the opening he stood outside his pavilion and wondered whether anyone would come. His modest Temple of Sculpture was in marked contrast to the spectacular pavilions of Science and Industry. The near-by Palace of Electricity, the feature of the fairgrounds, glowed with dazzling lights which proclaimed that a century of progress was assuredly ahead. Everyone would prefer this tower of light, he told himself. But he could not turn back now. Eighty thousand francs had gone into his pavilion, 60,000 loaned by the bankers. His future depended on how many visitors the pavilion would attract at one franc a person. The fee was little enough, but he had a sinking sensation that the hostility of the Beaux Arts, the Institute and the Academy might prevail. Hardly anyone did come to his pavilion until the Minister of Education appeared and stated that M. Rodin's "The Gates of Hell" was the work of a patriotic Frenchman.

Patriotism was in favour again. Reconciliation was replacing civil disunity. Thanks to Zola, who had had to flee to England to escape prison and to be able to continue fighting for Dreyfus, the former officer had been brought back to France, and though he had been found guilty at a new trial a pardon had been granted. This was considered the ideal French compromise: it implied that Dreyfus was innocent, yet the honour of the army had been saved. Zola's indictment had been dropped and he had returned to France a hero.

Now the Rodin pavilion became the place to visit. Thousands of visitors came to see whether the unfinished "Gates" and the "Balzac" were as horrifying as people said they were. But the greatest interest was in his nude pairs, especially "The Kiss."

His heads of Camille, Hugo, Baudelaire, Falguière and Dalou attracted attention because there was gossip connected with the subjects. Everyone knew that Auguste and Dalou were bitter enemies now. Jean Falguière had been given the commission for the "Balzac" by the Société. Yet he and Auguste had remained friends, and Auguste had done a head of Falguière while the latter was completing his Balzac. Falguière's "Balzac," a large, stout man placed on a park bench, looked like a prosperous businessman, and everyone was ignoring it. The heads of Camille drew many people; Rodin's relationship with her had become one of the worst-kept secrets in a Paris doting on such affairs.

There were still those who spoke of Rodin with abusive malice, but to the world outside France he was now one of the glories of the Third Republic. Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, in Paris to open the Pont Alexandre III, named after his father, visited the Rodin pavilion. The Prince of Wales spent a whole afternoon there. Loubet, the new President of the Republic, came.

Paris was unpredictable indeed. Whom it punished one year it praised the next. Rodin's work had become a matter of national pride when museums from other countries competed for his statues. Copenhagen bought 80,000 francs' worth of Rodin pieces. The Philadelphia Museum purchased "Thought," for which Camille had modelled; the Chicago Museum bought "The Kiss," and then had to drape it when a shocked outcry arose. Museums in Budapest, Dresden, Prague and London acquired more of his work.

Private collectors offered more commissions than he could take When he raised his prices to discourage commissions he didn't want, his work became more coveted. The more he charged, the more the collectors bought. It had become fashionable to acquire a Rodin.

By the time the exhibition was over and he had moved his work back to Meudon, he had sold more than 200,000 francs' worth of sculpture. After expenses had been deducted, he had 60,000 francs. There was no more anxiety about money. He could work as he pleased.

But when Carrière, his best friend, asked whether he had met his expenses, he replied, "Just about, *mon ami*." He knew he should not be suspicious of Carrière, of all people. He said, "Do you need any help, Eugène?" The painter was very poor.

"No, no, no!" Carrière cried. Then, seeing Auguste looking uneasy, he threw his arms round Auguste's shoulders and added, "I was just hoping you had had enough success to bring you peace of mind."

When Auguste heard that Camille was living in Paris, he asked Carrière to visit her in the hope of a reconciliation. The painter was the gentlest person he knew—an ideal peacemaker.

But Camille greeted him coldly. Carrière stood in the doorway of her studio-living-room, trying not to appear as uncomfortable as he felt. Apparently she was living alone. He saw clay figures, plaster casts, bronzes, but the only furnishings were a bed and a chair. Her face had a pale, drawn asceticism. There was grey in her hair, her skin was sallow, there was only a little left of her beauty, he noted sadly.

She ignored his hand and said with a weary bitterness, "Well, monsieur, you've found me. It's no use. I didn't act from revenge but from principle." She refused to discuss Auguste.

Rodin, however, learning that she was in financial trouble, and that her work was bringing low prices, arranged for the Minister of Fine Arts to buy several pieces for provincial museums; the Minister refused to consider them for the Louvre or the Luxembourg though Auguste suggested this. And when he was given one-man exhibitions in Brussels and Prague, he put her bust of him in the place of honour. He heard later that she disparaged it, declaring, "It is just a student's effort. He could have got my work in the Luxembourg if he had tried."

Auguste sent Carrière back to her with an offer of assistance, and she

rejected it angrily. She said that these offers of help were a persecution. She became so hostile in a sudden burst of hysteria that Carrière was alarmed for her sanity. She was half sobbing and half laughing. "It's murder, my career was murdered, I must break free, be my own master. And no one will stop me, no one" He left her in this strange, feverish frenzy.

Auguste was sad when he heard about this scene. And he was heartbroken a few weeks later when he was told that Camille had had a nervous breakdown and had been put in a *maison de santé*. The thought of her in an insane asylum made his blood run cold. Yet he was not responsible, he told himself, she had been emotionally unstable for a long time. Poor Camille!

He went to see her and she looked at him as if he were a stranger, as if she had never known this bearded, tired man. She was in black, and so thin it was shocking. Only her musical voice remained of the beautiful girl he had fallen in love with. Suddenly she went off in a torrent of emotion, not talking to him, or to anyone. "My head, '*Grand'mère*,' won third prize, they kept the first from me, and now they want to put me in the women's prison of St. Lazare"

She motioned to the attendant: Who was this man? Why was he here? The doctor informed Auguste that he must go and that he could not see Camille again.

He was desolate until, a month later, he heard that Camille had been released from the *maison de santé* with the diagnosis that she had had a nervous disorder, not a mental one—and had returned to her studio-living-room and was working with savage concentration. But she was accusing him of having her followed, of wanting her put in the women's prison of St. Lazare.

ROSE HAD thought that with the departure of Camille she would have all of Auguste emotionally. But she still had very little of him. At Meudon he ignored her for his work. When she scolded him for this he looked sorrowful, as if afflicted like Job. He was as preoccupied with his Paris studios as before, and he was attentive to other women. When she heard this, she was upset, but she knew that he would return to her after each affair—he always had.

Now a new representative from the Ministry of Fine Arts, Rolf Balle, informed him there could be no more delays with "The Gates of Hell," and Auguste pointed out that the building of the Museum of Decorative Arts still hadn't been started.

The young man replied vehemently, "That's not the point. There have been complaints in the Chamber of Deputies about a department that allows money to be spent with nothing to show in return."

Auguste could not admit that he was bored with "The Gates." He said, as usual, "Two more years," though not believing he would finish by 1904. He asked abruptly, "How old are you?"

"Twenty-six, *maître*."

"Then you were four when I started them."

"I've heard about them all my life. Do you really think you will finish this time? They will demand the money back if you don't."

Auguste said curtly, "That will be France's loss, not mine."

But it was now a matter of pride with him to finish "The Gates." One grey day he was staring at them when a young man appeared at the door. "How did you get past the concierge?" Auguste demanded. "Fifty francs?"

"I told him the truth. I am writing a book about you, *maître*, to be published in Germany. I am the poet Rainer Maria Rilke."

The name meant nothing to Auguste. Rilke was attractive: slim, small, dark, with intense blue eyes and a black moustache. He said that his wife, Frau Clara Westhoff, was a sculptress, and he spoke of Rodin's sculpture with such understanding that Auguste was impressed and pleased. The young man aroused a paternal feeling in him.

He invited Rilke to Meudon, and allowed him the run of his studios. The poet's avid attention stimulated him to talk. He considered himself a reticent man, but with Rilke he was talking as a master to a disciple. And he was touched when Rilke wrote several poems in French and dedicated them to him.

One afternoon, Rilke asked, "Why don't you make an individual figure out of the naked man sitting on top of 'The Gates?' "

"The Poet? Dante?" Auguste was dubious.

"He doesn't look like a poet. He looks more like a brute, with his heavy features and muscular body."

Auguste was not sure he enjoyed this criticism. But he sat down to think, resting his chin on his hand and his elbow on his knee. Perhaps Rilke was right.

"*Maître*, you look just like him," Rilke exclaimed, "when you are thinking so hard."

Thinking—that was it. Thinking was a struggle. And this man was trying to think with all his strength. From then on the poet became "The Thinker," and Auguste made a rough model of him, life-size.

News came that Zola had died, asphyxiated in a room with tightly shut windows and a blocked chimney. There were rumours that he had been murdered because of the Dreyfus affair, and some gloated over his death, but many, like Rodin, were saddened. He joined the long line following Zola's hearse, walking with Carrière and Monet.

AUGUSTE had already received a second award of the Legion of Honour; and now he was given his third, that of Commander. His friends gave a picnic to celebrate. Bourdelle and Carrière made the arrangements, and after lunch in the forest of Vélizy, close to Versailles, Isadora Duncan danced. This was a pleasant surprise to Auguste. He and the famous American dancer had become friends in recent years and she had posed for him. He thought her dancing lovely and Grecian.

Rose, sitting by Auguste's side, was happy. It was the first time he had invited her to a party with his friends; this was recognition at last, but as always, he introduced her as Madame Rose. She thought Isadora a very pretty young woman, but she didn't care for her dancing, and was relieved that Auguste treated the dancer in a paternal way. Rose felt almost secure. She prayed there would be no more of the awful loneliness.

Soon afterwards, Henley died, then Auguste's old friend Fantin, then Aunt Thérèse. Her passing and Fantin's were a shock to Auguste, but Henley's death was a terrible blow. Henley had become one of the few artistic friends he could trust. It made him feel that his generation was being wiped out, that with each passing year he was closer to death.

As always, when made desolate by the death of a friend, he turned to his work. He focused on "The Thinker" and vowed that until he finished this figure he would not permit any interruptions. But he was



THE THINKER

facing a new difficulty: many days now he lacked energy. Often, just when his conception seemed about to fulfil itself, he was afflicted with weariness and had to stop. "The Thinker" was becoming a race against time. He could still do busts, hands and small work easily, but large works made serious drains on his energy.

If "The Thinker" was going to be his last epic figure, as he feared, he wanted it to be unforgettable. The Greeks and Michelangelo had created bodies of great beauty, but he had to do something more.

Man had come to thinking, Auguste reflected, only after the most laborious effort—even now thinking was as painful as it was difficult. To think was to suffer, to ask, Who am I? Where am I going? Why?

Auguste redid his model larger than life-size, and now he was sure that man was not a civilized creature struggling against a corrupt world, but a brute struggling to rise out of the animal state, and not always succeeding. He felt this especially in himself. And he came to believe that the effort to climb out of the beast and into the thinker was such a burden that he modelled the final figure twice life-size, to show the magnitude of the struggle.

He debated about the position of the arm resting on the opposite leg, for it was not natural; but he felt that the strain of the position conveyed the effort to evolve from brute to thinker. The body became massive, the shoulders powerful, the feet and hands enormous. The figure throbbed with energy and dominated the space about it.

He stressed the brooding, stubborn strength, believing it characteristic of a life that was essentially tragic. He emphasized the huge head and the magnificent hand that bore this immense weight. And as "The Thinker" became alive, Auguste became more exhausted. When he finished, he was drained.

He asked Carrière to view the completed plaster. Carrière stared at "The Thinker" for so long in silence that Auguste was certain he had failed.

Then Carrière said, "For me he is the first man who could think, and this effort has brought him the realization of the tragic destiny of his species. Such an effort to think, to be rational, such a terrible struggle. The flesh is more powerful than the mind, yet the mind seeks to emerge from the slime, as the body has."

"Then you like it, Eugène?"

"Like it? No. 'The Thinker' is me, my efforts, my sufferings. He is any of us."

Auguste sighed. "I thought so, but I'm so tired I've lost all sense of perspective. I'm afraid nobody will care for it."

"THE THINKER" was shown in the Salon of 1904, and again Auguste was severely criticized. Supporters of the Beaux Arts, the Institute and the Academy called it "a monster, an ape man." Auguste's friends replied by raising 15,000 francs to buy the statue. They presented it to Paris, for the Panthéon.

Auguste was sure that the Municipal Council would not allow "The Thinker" to be placed in Paris. But Rolf Balle, speaking for the Ministry of Fine Arts, suggested a compromise. Auguste agreed to give back the 25,700 francs advanced for "The Gates," plus interest; and the Municipal Council accepted "The Thinker," which would be placed in front of the Panthéon.

Auguste was proud; this would be his first work in a Paris public square. It was a further solace when the Ministry of Fine Arts bought a copy of the original plaster cast of "The Thinker" and presented it to the Metropolitan Museum of New York as a gift from France.

But Auguste's great pleasure came when he was asked to preside at a banquet to honour Carrière on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Carrière's first exhibition. The distinguished guest list included Clemenceau, Monet, Renoir, M. and Mme. Curie, Claude Debussy and Anatole France. Auguste was particularly pleased that Renoir came, for his old friend's rheumatism had become so painful that it required an heroic effort for him to go anywhere.

Carrière arrived looking haggard and gloomy. Auguste noticed that he had to force a smile as guests congratulated him. After the banquet Auguste ordered a carriage to take Carrière home, and they rode silently up to Montmartre, where Carrière had lived for many years with his wife and children.

At the door Carrière said, "I don't know what to do, Auguste. I have cancer. I felt so ill this week that I didn't think I could go to the banquet. I went to the doctor today, and he told me."

Auguste, shaken to his roots, sought to be the consolation Carrière had always been to him. "The doctor could be wrong."

"He is not wrong."

"What about an operation?"

"He may try. He wants me to continue painting, if I can."

"You will, you will!"

Carrière sensed Auguste's emotion and said, "*Merci, mon ami,* it helps to know you are near. Perhaps it is not so serious."

The next few months Carrière was able to work, though the pain continued. And Auguste treated him with a tenderness that helped the painter to go on with dignity and resignation.

A LETTER arrived from Rilke asking whether he might see the *maître* when he returned to Paris from Germany shortly. Auguste had his secretary—his third in the last year—wire Rilke that he must come to Meudon.

Rilke's first few days at Meudon were happy ones for both of them. They shared the beauty of the autumnal countryside and the variety and excitement of Rodin's sculpture. At Meudon Auguste had a copy of everything he had done. He found himself mellowing under Rilke's praise and perceptive understanding. But the world intruded—requests for portrait commissions, people clamouring to see him, and letters from all over the world. He was again without a secretary, having fired the most recent one, and could not cope with all this. Rilke suggested, "*Maître*, perhaps I could help you."

He beamed, but said, "No, you are a poet, not a secretary."

"You need a poet. Someone who understands you. I need not work full time, but whenever you need me."

Rodin liked the idea of Rilke's remaining. "You can help me several hours a day," he said.

At first Rilke helped Auguste two hours a day. The two hours lengthened to four, to six, and then to the whole day. Rilke tried not to mind that he had no time for his own work, for he felt the great old man needed him.

Carrière was operated on for cancer. The operation was a failure, and afterwards the painter was unable to leave his bed. Auguste, in his

concern for his failing friend, grew ill-tempered with Rilke. He thought Rilke didn't understand his French, and often asked him to rewrite letters. He treated him like an employee; rarely now did he confide in him or discuss art. He was curt and complaining.

Rilke had become friendly with Madame Rose, touched by her desire to mother him. Rose liked this gentle young man—he was even younger than *petit* Auguste, who was still young to her, though almost forty—and she enjoyed feeding Rilke her favourite dishes for he was frail and sickly-looking. She and Rilke shared the same complaint: often the *maître* would leave for Paris without telling either of them. Rose's carefully prepared lunch would grow cold, and then a visitor would arrive for an appointment made by Rilke for the *maître*.

One day Rilke came upon Rose handing a shabbily dressed man some francs—it was *petit* Auguste—and later she told him about her son. "He and his father have never got on," she said. "*Petit* Auguste can't work hard; he's not very strong and his father has always been too strict." She added, "Even with me."

Rilke had noticed that when the *maître* was busy he ignored Madame Rose. But when she hurt her ankle trying to protect her ducks and chickens from a marauding hawk, he displayed great tenderness. He carried her to their old brass bed, and though there were visitors waiting for him, he stayed with her until a doctor came and assured him the injury was nothing to worry about.

RODIN was by Carrière's side every possible moment, much as he hated and avoided all aspects of death. Carrière kept mumbling, "One must go on," and Auguste felt a bitter inadequacy as his friend slipped away from him. At the grave he spoke of Carrière's gentleness and genius. He paid for the funeral and gave the widow enough to live on temporarily. Once when he was at her house, he heard a prominent art dealer, who had said it was impossible to sell Carrière's work, offer the widow 7,000 francs for a canvas. Auguste was suspicious of this sudden generosity. He said, "I am Carrière's executor. You're probably getting seventy thousand for the painting." *Mon Dieu!* He had learned about the tricks of dealers. "If you don't give Madame Carrière a fair price, I will make a public scandal."

The dealer looked stunned. He mumbled, "How did you know I sold it for seventy thousand?"

It had been a wild guess. Auguste took the money, wrote out a receipt for it, and gave it to Mme. Carrière.

Soon afterwards the temporary plaster of "The Thinker" was placed before the Panthéon. Auguste approved of the placing, thinking the statue would look even better in bronze. The next night "The Thinker" was shattered into a hundred pieces by students from the Beaux Arts. There was only one consolation: there was still the original cast.

Rilke came to him with a letter from a Charlotte Shaw asking him to do a bust of her husband, Bernard Shaw, the writer. Auguste had never heard of the man, and he had had too much trouble with writers. He told Rilke to refuse. But Rilke was certain that Shaw was a coming man and he wanted to meet him. He wrote to Mrs. Shaw that the *maître* charged £800 for a bronze and £1,000 for a marble, and that, if she deposited money for the *maître* in a Paris bank, he might reconsider.

A few days later Auguste received a letter from Charlotte Shaw saying that she had put £1,000 in a Paris bank in his name. He was impressed. He liked such promptness. She went on to say that her husband was a renowned writer and that he would be remembered as an idiot if, living in the same time as Auguste Rodin, he failed to have his head done by the greatest sculptor in the world.

Auguste said to Rilke, "Tell him to come to Paris and I will see."

Several weeks later Shaw and his wife came to Paris. Rodin was fascinated by Shaw's face. He felt a Christ-like essence in the writer's features, and he approved of Mrs. Shaw. He was pleased with the way she hovered protectively over her husband. He suggested that they work at Meudon, and, although ordinarily he didn't allow anyone but the sitter in his studio while he modelled, he admitted Charlotte Shaw.

Rose was curious about this dignified couple who came every morning. She looked into the studio while Auguste was working, and he ordered her out. He didn't introduce her to the Shaws.

Shaw chuckled and said, "That's the way to treat women. They are always pursuing men." Auguste nodded. Shaw was civilized, and he had such noble features—as Auguste told Charlotte, "*une vraie tête de Christ*," and wondered why she smiled strangely.

One morning, as Auguste began his tenth version of the Shaw bust, Shaw grew restless and asked when Rodin expected to finish.

Auguste said curtly, "That's my concern, not yours. Do you listen to anyone telling you when to finish your work?"

Shaw smiled. "Of course not. But I am such a good model I should be paid for sitting."

"You will be: you will have a head by Auguste Rodin."

Now they understood each other and their mutual respect grew. Shaw was fascinated by the way Auguste worked. He measured Shaw's features to the fraction of an inch with his callipers. He made Shaw lie face down, while he examined the back of his head and neck. Next he made Shaw lie face up while he studied Shaw's frontal contours. Then he sat Shaw at eye level. Feeling on the right track at last, he did a dozen clay heads to the dimensions he had obtained. He said, "We have the physical features, now we have to pursue the expressions."

He ran his fingers over Shaw's face, then over the clay to be sure the contours were exact and had the subject's warmth. Then he worked feverishly on one head, as if finally he had caught the expression.

But the next day he resumed modelling the other heads he had started. Shaw said, "I prefer the head you did yesterday."

Auguste said, "I did also. But I couldn't be certain until I tried several other styles."

"Are we finished then?"

Auguste looked shocked, and Shaw reflected that for Rodin a head was never finished while the subject was alive. He said, "I'd like to take it home."

Charlotte asked, "*Maître*, may we have it? It would mean a great deal to me. You have captured a new, different expression. I didn't believe you when you said my husband had a Christ-like quality, but now that you have given it to him I realize he can be that way, whatever he pretends."

"Do you want it in bronze or marble?"

"What do you think?"

"I will make it in both," Auguste said. "It will be my pleasure."

Shaw said, "The greatest writer in the world, done by the greatest sculptor." Auguste shrugged and said, "Time will decide that."

The next day Auguste asked Rilke if anyone of importance had called recently. Rilke said, "No, but one man was very insistent, an elderly chap, André Cholet."

Auguste exploded. "Cholet is my good friend and a fine writer—he defended me during the Balzac affair! You should have known him by reputation! That is why I am employing you." He stalked away, very angry.

Rilke felt dreadful. He had not been permitted to talk to Shaw, except as a secretary, and Shaw had remained ignorant of his identity as a poet. Also, he couldn't maintain this pace much longer; he was working sixteen hours a day. Meudon was chaos, with people waiting everywhere to see the *maître*, who had given orders he was not seeing anyone; the mail was heavier than ever; and Rilke was the culprit when anything went wrong.

Several days later Auguste found a letter to Rilke from Rothenstein, a young English painter with whom Auguste was friendly. This struck him as treachery. He accused the secretary of stealing his friends.

Rilke said, "*Maître*, the last thing I want to do is hurt you. But secretarial work is not my trade."

"You've made that evident. Leave at once, as soon as you pack your things."

Two days later there was a letter from Rilke. Auguste was surprised that it was not bursting with recriminations. Instead, Rilke said that the sculptor would always remain his inspiration and *maître* no matter what happened. The part Auguste liked best was where Rilke wrote that the *maître*, as a great artist, had to push aside anything that threatened his work. That was true, thought Auguste.

THE FINISHED bronze of "The Thinker" was placed in front of the Panthéon. There were speeches, and many gendarmes to make sure no one damaged the statue.

Rodin felt lost. He had been living with "The Thinker" in one form or another since he had begun "The Gates of Hell" twenty-six years ago. And now he was through with it.

He took a last look at the figure, hunched before the Panthéon. Now he must turn to other things, if he had the strength.

He was startled to hear the familiar voice of his old friend Boucher. "Your 'Thinker' has the look of a man who, now that he has arrived at thinking, doesn't like what he thinks."

"Yes," said Auguste. "The longer I live, the more it looks as if man has come to thinking too soon, before he is ready."

ON JULY 12, 1906, Alfred Dreyfus was exonerated; all previous verdicts were cancelled and he was declared innocent. Rodin was gratified. Long ago he had become convinced of the officer's innocence. Then he felt sad, for it reminded him that many of the people involved in the Dreyfus affair were gone.

The recollection sent him in search of Cholet, to explain Rilke's mistake. He found him in a shabby room in a small hotel, looking aged and tired. When Auguste apologized for Rilke, Cholet said, "He meant well. I was in need of money then, but I don't need any now. I've been given an advance on a new play."

But Auguste thrust his hand into his pocket and gave Cholet all the notes he found there, not bothering to count them.

Cholet, seeing that there were several hundred francs, was amazed and touched. "You must be in great demand these days."

"Too much," grumbled Auguste. "Between kings and millionaires, I'm becoming a society sculptor."

Cholet squeezed Rodin's hand gratefully. "Take advantage of it, *mon ami*. Poverty is a bad business, believe me."

Several weeks later the King of Greece visited Meudon to buy some of Rodin's pieces and to present the sculptor with a torso from the Parthenon. Auguste invited the King to stay for lunch and was happy when he accepted. They were sitting at the table when Rose, fearing there would be no other way to see the King, entered in her kitchen apron to serve the meal. Auguste flushed angrily—they had servants—but when the King seemed to know who she was, he mumbled, "Madame Rose." The King said, "How charming," and gallantly offered his hand. Rose backed away in distress. She whispered, "I'm only a simple housewife," and fled.

"Mon Dieu!" Auguste shouted. "Don't you know how to behave?"

Edward VII of England visited Meudon soon after and Auguste

forced Rose to stay in her room with a servant to keep her there. She could view the King only from behind curtains.

The former Prince of Wales, stouter than before, was curious about "The Gates." He wanted to climb up to see the original of "The Thinker" on top, but Auguste wouldn't let him. There was a bird's nest on top, and he would not allow it to be disturbed.

The King asked the sculptor to do a bust of a very close friend, a lady who was a great beauty. The fee he suggested was generous and Auguste couldn't say no. But he refused to allow the King in the studio while the lady modelled. The King was angry, but he gave in. Afterwards, he was glad. He thought the finished marble exquisite.

Rose complained bitterly that Auguste had failed to introduce her to the King of England. He said, "You wouldn't have dressed right. You're not educated."

She cried, "Then why didn't you educate me?"

"If I had, I would have lost you." And he asked her to prepare lunch. She hurried off, delighted to serve him. An hour later she called him and found he had left for Paris.

It did not relieve her feelings when she returned to the kitchen and found *petit* Auguste eating the lunch. She exploded in a tirade against his father and he shrugged, "What do you expect?" And when he had gulped down all the meat and wine, he asked for money.

Was he ever going to grow up? She said, "I just gave you some. Don't you ever think of working?"

"You sound like him now." *Petit* Auguste stood up. "If you don't want me to come any more, I won't." He wrapped the rest of the pudding and put it into his pocket. "You know he's making a lot of money," he said. "He must give you some. You've got thousands of francs stored away. Where are they, Rose?"

She stared at his grey hair, his alcoholic face, his black fingernails—and she thought that the boy had had only the worst of his father. He was a poor wandering dog, drifting from woman to woman, claiming to be an artist because his father was. The only way he made money was by bartering Auguste's old clothes which she gave him. Yet when he looked sad and weary, as he did suddenly now, her heart cried, How can I refuse him! She gave him fifty francs and was hurt when he said,

"Is that all you can spare?" He walked off, ignoring the entreaty in her eyes. The door slammed behind him. She felt forsaken.

A week later Auguste returned from Paris. As usual, he didn't explain his absence. Rose declared, "It must have been another woman," and he replied, "Well, at least it wasn't Camille." He thought she would explode in her jealousy and rage. He was sorry for her and said, "But you were the one I cared for the most, we're still together."

"Because I was born to serve," she said bitterly, and tears trickled down her cheeks. Moved by her pain, he took her hands which long ago had lost their softness and held them to his lips. "Now I need the peace of evening, Rose," he said.

She wasn't sure she believed him; he was still a virile man. She murmured, "But you get restless. You always have."

"I'm not made of stone. And emotion is sometimes a tyrant. Could I have some lunch, *ma chatte*?"

No, no, she wanted to cry. But she said, "Meat and wine?"

"Whatever you prepare, Rose."

THE following year Auguste was awarded an honorary degree by Oxford University. He sat with Mark Twain, Camille Saint-Saëns, the composer, and General Booth of the Salvation Army, who were also receiving degrees, and wondered what he was doing here. He remembered how poorly he had done at school—arithmetic and spelling still baffled him—he had never got into the Beaux Arts, and Papa and Mama hadn't been able even to read or write. But now they had clothed him in a fine red silk gown and black velvet cap and were bestowing upon him the degree of Doctor *honoris causa*, describing him as a scholar of sculpture.

On his return to Paris, Rilke, still his friend, took Rodin one day to Hôtel Biron, where his wife had a studio. Auguste fell in love at first sight with this superb eighteenth-century château which had been converted into apartments. It was in the quiet rue de Varenne, just round the corner from Les Invalides and Napoleon's tomb. He was enchanted with the fine gardens.

"Isadora Duncan and Matisse have studios here," Rilke told him. "The ground floor is available, but very expensive."

"I will rent it. Rilke, find out when I can move in."

He moved into Hôtel Biron in 1908, and resolved to remain here the rest of his life. But his fellow tenant, Isadora Duncan, was pessimistic. They stood in the rotunda which looked out on the garden.

Isadora said, "Ever since the republic took over the management of this property from the Convent of the Sacred Heart, there has been public agitation because of the parties I give. They say my parties are a sacrilege."

"I'm too old to give parties," he said. He knew Isadora had wild, bohemian friends.

"We won't disturb you, Auguste," she promised.

He settled down to work, and soon felt completely at home. Rose, of course, was distressed by this move.

Shortly after he moved, Auguste was received at the Élysée Palace by President Fallières, at a party given in his honour. The President was telling him about the letters addressed to "Auguste Rodin, France," when a middle-aged woman interrupted him to introduce herself as the Duchess of Choiseul. She was an American who had married a Frenchman with an old title. The Duchess chatted animatedly about his sculpture. She said, "*Maître*, this is the greatest night of my life! I've been wanting to meet you. It's why I came tonight."

The Duchess was a slim, sharp-featured, vivacious woman with a red slash of a mouth and a pointed nose. She never stopped talking about his work. When it was time to go home, she offered him a lift in her car. He found himself accepting, though he disliked cars.

When they reached Hôtel Biron, it wasn't late, and she came in. He hadn't actually invited her, and yet she had made it seem natural and inevitable. She curled up in his favourite chair, and he stood in the centre of the room, looking flustered. She decided she could solve his dilemma only by doing the courting.

She said, "Auguste, we must be honest with each other. I've never met an artist who moves me more." She stood up and wrapped her arms round him.

Before he knew what was happening, he found himself making love to her. Or rather, he realized, she was making love to him. He hadn't expected such intensity. She made him forget everything else.

During the next few months, there were moments when he couldn't endure her flattery, her heavy make-up, her tireless vivacity, but he came to depend upon her with a kind of desperation, as if she would keep away old age.

His friends wondered how he could put up with her. Rilke told him that the Duchess was a leech, and Auguste was so irate he didn't speak to the poet for days. And when he caught Bourdelle referring to her as "Duchess Influenza," he ordered him out of his studio. He assured himself that the Duchess was the ideal person to take care of the many demands made upon him, she understood his work, and their intimate life was sensible—there was no nonsense about romantic love.

He decided to do a bust of the Duchess, in order to avoid taking her to the races at Longchamps and to one society dinner after another. As her features came to life in his hands, nothing else mattered. It was as if he had never been ill, distracted, weary. Modelling again, he was being cleansed. She complained that he made her features too sharp, and he retorted, "That's the way they are."

"But I'm prettier. You're making me look like a shrew."

When she wanted him to stop because she was tired, he refused. Finally the bust was finished. He thought it was good. She was upset that he didn't ask her if she was pleased.

At Meudon, Rose was alone for weeks at a time. She had learned about the Duchess, but she felt powerless. She was certain she was losing Auguste for good and she wandered round the grounds of Meudon like a lost soul, worrying, hoarding every franc for the day when she would need it.

RODIN was worried himself. After having found the studio where he wanted to live the rest of his life, he was informed he would have to move. The State had decided to sell Hôtel Biron to business interests. Shaken by the news, he went to see Premier Clemenceau and asked him to prevent the sale. He said, "Monsieur, I'm not young. To make me move at my age is cruel. Can't you force the State to keep Biron?"

"*Mon ami*, you are naïve. I would be ridiculed."

"I will not move. You will have to evict me," Auguste said with sudden satisfaction. "It will create a scandal."

Clemenceau wanted to laugh. Still, one never knew how much of a commotion Rodin might make. The citizenry might enjoy supporting him. He assured Auguste that he would do what he could.

Partly as the result of pressure created by Rodin's influential friends, the Senate voted to defer the sale; later the State bought Biron outright, for almost six million francs. Auguste was sure he had won his battle. Thus it was a shock when he was ordered to abandon the premises in three months. There had been renewed complaints about the wild parties on the premises of a former convent school.

The idea of embarking on another battle made Auguste weary. He would be seventy-one in a few weeks; he had hardly enough strength for his work. This dispute might drag on for years, he wouldn't be alive when it was resolved. But to move would be too upsetting. He evolved a plan that seemed almost too simple, but he went again to Clemenceau.

"Suppose I turn over all my work to France?" he suggested. "In exchange, do you think I could live at Biron for the rest of my life?"

"And later form a museum?" Clemenceau grew thoughtful.

"A Rodin Museum, if it wouldn't be too vain. I will sign over everything I've done to France. At the rate my work is selling, you will not lose any money."

"You would do this just to live there?" Clemenceau was surprised by such a generous offer.

"Yes. And so that there will be a Rodin Museum when I am gone."

"It's an interesting idea, and worth trying, *maître*. Have a petition prepared—not by you, you can't afford to be directly involved—but by your most influential friends, to make this appear philanthropic. Then approach me, Briand and Poincaré. One of us should be Premier at that time and something might be arranged."

Rodin's offer became a national issue. His supporters pointed out that his work should be worth more than six million francs, the price of Biron, in a few years, and that the museum would be a national asset. While a decision was being reached, the State gave Rodin an eighteen months' stay at Biron with a possibility of renewal.

Rodin, grateful to Clemenceau, did a bust of him. The politician, however, would not take it, saying, "Rodin, you've made me look as cunning as an Oriental potentate."

"Aren't you half Tamerlane and half Genghis Khan?" said Auguste. He asked whether any decision had been reached about his offer, and Clemenceau snapped, "Your friends have become too militant. Poincaré said to me the other day, 'The main subject these days is not Germany, Russia, Turkey, nor our *Entente Cordiale*, but Monsieur Rodin. Biron is a damned nuisance.' "

The Duchess was waiting to hear the results of this meeting, and when Auguste said, "It looks hopeful," unwilling to admit anything else, she was distraught. If the State accepted his offer, it would upset her plans. Later, she questioned Rilke about Rodin's obligations to Rose, and whether *petit* Auguste had any chance of inheriting his money. Rilke was horrified.

Rodin ordered her to get tickets for the Ballet Russe, which was coming to Paris. "I want a box close to the stage," he said. Many dancers had posed for him, and now he wanted to study the great Nijinsky.

She resented his peremptory tone, and told him that there were stories that the new ballet Nijinsky was to dance in, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune,* was lewd and shocking. He said severely, "I'm sure these rumours are lies. Nijinsky is a superb artist."

RODIN's box for the first performance of the new ballet was next to the stage, and as he entered it he was greeted by the audience with an ovation that surprised and pleased him.

L'Après-midi d'un Faune was taken from a poem by Mallarmé. Auguste was not hopeful about the music, he rarely liked Debussy, but he was eager to see the dancing and choreography.

The lights went down, and he became fascinated by the sensuousness and urgency of the dancer's performance as the faun—half human, half animal. But when the curtain came down, the audience split in two: half applauded wildly and half booed and hissed. Rodin jumped to his feet and cheered. After the final curtain, he hurried backstage, embraced Nijinsky fervently and cried, "We are comrades, *mon ami*, comrades. Your dancing is sculpture in motion."

He was shocked the next day to read a vicious attack on the *Faune* in *Le Figaro* by its owner-editor, Calmette, who described Nijinsky's "bestiality and gestures of shamelessness."

Auguste wrote a passionate answer, which appeared the next day in *Le Matin*, *Figaro's* chief competitor. He was stunned when he then became the target for a vicious attack in *Le Figaro*. Calmette wrote:

> I admire Rodin deeply as one of our most illustrious sculptors, but I must decline to accept his judgment on the question of theatrical morality . . . in defiance of propriety, he exhibits . . . in the former apartments of the excellent nuns at Hôtel Biron a series of objectionable drawings and cynical sketches which depict . . . the shameless attitudes of the Faune. . . . It is inconceivable that the State—in other words the French taxpayer—should purchase Hôtel Biron for 6,000,000 francs simply to allow the richest of our sculptors to live there. . . .

Paris was bursting with propriety. Many people, including public officials, regarded Auguste as a lustful old satyr, and there was agitation to get him out of Hôtel Biron at once. He thought sadly that he had made two mistakes he would always regret, his provocation of Calmette and his failure to support Dreyfus.

He composed a statement which appeared in the press the next day, saying, "I have no time to waste on answering M. Calmette's attack on me," and praising Nijinsky's dancing and the ballet.

Nijinsky visited Auguste to express his gratitude for this ardent defence. The sculptor was startled by the dancer's appearance. He could not believe this short, slight, insignificant man was the faun who enchanted him. Nijinsky wanted to model for him and he agreed.

Diaghilev, the *maître de ballet*, escorted Nijinsky to the first session and was amused by the sculptor's distress over the controversy. He said, "Pro-Faunists, pro-Rodinists, anti-Faunists, anti-Rodinists. Let them scream, *maître*, it is making us an enormous success."

Nijinsky agreed to come three afternoons a week until the statue was finished. However, he was taken aback when the sculptor asked him to pose nude. His body was insignificant, but when he moved, he came alive; Auguste struck out boldly, seeing this statue of the faun as the epitome of his plastic skill, just as Nijinsky was the epitome of movement. He worked in a serene silence, becoming so involved that he increased the sessions to five a week.

Then Diaghilev informed Nijinsky that they had to leave for London at once for their coming season. Auguste was deeply disappointed.

IN THE last few years Auguste had had severe aches in his bones. There had been days when it was a terrible struggle to work, the pain in his hands was so severe. Now he felt weak, shaky, nauseated, dizzy. He could not stand. The doctor said the *maître* had bronchitis and must stay in bed for a few weeks. The Duchess nodded enthusiastically. She moved into Biron as his nurse and forbade him to see anyone, particularly Rose, who, she said, would only aggravate his condition.

He didn't have the energy to oppose her. The more she spoke about his poor health, the more he thought about it, and the pains in his arms increased. He wondered if he would ever be able to work again.

The Duchess sat by his bed while the servant fed him, and assured him, "You've sold enough work to support you, even if you live to be eighty-nine, like Michelangelo."

He winced. She made him feel that he did not want to live.

He asked, "What about Biron? My extension expires soon."

"Don't worry. They wouldn't dispossess such a sick man."

"I'm not that sick." He was angry at her wish to mother him.

"Sick enough, monsieur," she said blithely.

A month passed and the Duchess still insisted he remain in bed, though some strength had returned and he could walk without dizziness. He felt she was strangling him, even though it was out of concern. And he was worried about Rose. He said to the Duchess, "I don't know how Rose is managing."

She said with easy condescension, "The way she always has."

"She needs money to live on."

"Everyone knows she has thousands of francs stored away."

"Everyone." He regarded her intently. "The Duchess of Choiseul, you mean?"

"It's common knowledge that since your exhibition at the place de l'Alma you've been making at least two hundred thousand francs a year." He was silent. He was not certain how much he had been earning. Whenever he made a large sale he put the money into a different bank. And if he didn't know, how did she?

Seeing him looking grim, she said, "You are not insulted, Auguste. I'm concerned about your sales. I want you to get what you deserve, so you will never be in want. You are careless about money."

He was upset. None of the other women he had known had shown any interest in his earnings. Rose hadn't dared to, and Camille had been too proud. He couldn't get Rose out of his mind. He asked, "Why hasn't Rose come to see me?"

"She doesn't want to."

"When I am sick? I don't believe you."

"Has she come?" the Duchess said triumphantly. "Has she, Auguste? Do you think I would have stayed away if I knew you were ill?"

He sank back in his bed, terribly weak suddenly. He couldn't tell where the physical pain ended and the emotional pain began.

The Duchess was delighted, he looked so acquiescent and manageable, and several days later she decided to strike. She felt consummately attractive in her hobble skirt to the ankles, her long fur-and-feather stole. She bestowed her brightest smile upon him, said he could sit up, and handed him a glass of his favourite Burgundy. This worked as she had planned. He caressed her hands, "You understand my needs."

She answered, "I would work wonders, if you'd let me."

"What do you mean?" He withdrew his hands.

"Well, the bust you made of me——" She put her hands back in his. "If I sold it, after you had it reproduced, it would bring you another ten or twenty thousand francs."

"But I didn't give it to you. You didn't like it."

She looked at him innocently. "Auguste, how could you think that? You said it was mine whenever I wanted it, and now I want it." He didn't answer. "Have you given the State the rights to reproductions of your work?"

"No. Not yet. Why?"

She hesitated, but he just looked interested, so she went on. "You know, the reproduction rights to your work are immensely valuable. Without any effort, you could make a fortune."

"How?" His voice remained soft, but his face reddened.

The idea is exciting him, she thought jubilantly. I am being clever. He can become rich without having to struggle with a single new piece. He is too old for that now. "You need someone to manage your affairs," she said.

"You?"

"Someone must do it. I can't see you throwing away opportunity after opportunity. I've made up a document that will ensure that you get the best price for your reproductions. There have been many orders for your old work since you've been ill, and I could have filled them, if this document I have prepared had been signed."

The contract stated that Auguste Rodin was assigning all dealer rights in his reproductions to the Duchess of Choiseul, who would take one-third of the receipts of sales. He reflected a minute, then said quietly, "Very well. Where do you want me to sign?"

She had to struggle to hide her joy. Her voice trembled as she told him where to sign the contract.

He took the pen she handed him, tested it on the white robe she had bought him—she could hardly believe her eyes—then handed it back to her, saying, "That's not even good for drawing."

"I didn't give it to you to draw with!" Must he torture her?

"Where are my clothes?" He got up and started to dress, and was surprised at how strong he felt. He said in a cold, harsh voice, "I've done no work for months."

She cried, injured, "You belittle everything I do! I give you all my time and have nothing to show for it!"

"Not even money."

"Auguste, the rights of reproduction are very valuable. You don't intend to give them to the State! You will live a long time yet."

He muttered, "You must think I'm an idiot, and maybe I was."

"What do you mean, *chéri*?"

"You said I was sick."

"You were. You still are." He was dressed now, and at the door. She shouted, panic-stricken, "Where are you going?"

"I had hesitated about giving my rights of reproduction to the State, but now you've convinced me. I'll speak to Poincaré about them at once. They can't turn down the museum then."

"Don't be so sure! You have many enemies!"

He looked at her carefully. Her face, sharply outlined by the bright sun and taut with rage, was gaunt. It was fantastic, he thought, that he had found these sharp bones, this painted skin attractive. He must have been ill indeed.

"When will you be back?" she asked, controlling herself.

"When you are gone, madame. For good."

Later Rodin said to Bourdelle at his studio, "Would you do me a great favour and go to Meudon and tell Madame Rose that I'll be there tonight, after I've seen the Premier?" He was annoyed and surprised by the curious look Bourdelle gave him, but the younger sculptor just said, "Yes, *maître*." Then it was his turn to be surprised as Auguste embraced him fervently.

Poincaré was glad to see Rodin; he had heard that the *maître* was ill. He thought the sculptor's offer to give the rights of reproduction to the people of France generous. But there was still the difficulty with the religious folk whom Calmette had stirred up.

The Premier said, "Now if you could only model the Pope, that would solve your problems."

ROSE had been working feverishly each day, cleaning, sewing, cooking with a dogged perseverance, as if this were the only way to keep her wits. Auguste had never stayed away this long before, not even with Camille. She was dusting the clay statuette of mother and child that Auguste had given her after *petit* Auguste was born, when Bourdelle arrived and gave her the message.

She almost dropped the statuette. Then she felt guilty that he had made the long journey from Paris. She said, "Antoine, you must have a bite to eat," and he said, "*Merci*, Rose, but I think it would be better if you got ready for the *maître*. Did you know he had been ill?"

She went white. "No. I couldn't reach him. What was wrong?"

"The doctor said bronchitis, but I think it was too much Duchess Influenza."

Rose was waiting for Auguste at the entrance to the house when he came into sight several hours later. She didn't say a word, but stepped forward to take his hand. He looked old and tired, she thought, but not ill, thank God!

He said, "*Bonjour, ma chatte.*"

She said, "*Bonjour, chéri.*"

As he turned to the studio, taking her with him, she cried, "Auguste, I didn't know you were ill, I didn't. I would have come at once!" He

said, "I know, I know." He walked through the studio to make sure all his pieces were still here, insisting that she accompany him. He said, "I must do a 'Christ.'"

The next few months Auguste worked at both Meudon and Biron, but he always spent his nights with Rose.

As the end of the Biron extension approached he grew anxious, and his apprehensions increased when the Ministry of Fine Arts ordered him to submit an inventory of all his work.



It took weeks to have this inventory made. His sculpture was worth six million—he was a millionaire, though he had very little money. He submitted the inventory to the Ministry. Months passed and there was no word. Nineteen thirteen came, the lease expired, and nothing happened.

One windy wet March day he was visited by Boucher. He was annoyed, for he was struggling with his "Christ." And Boucher had grown less friendly lately, as if Rodin's fame was too much for the younger sculptor to bear.

Boucher was pale and drawn as he asked, "Have you heard about Camille?"

"No."

"You knew she had several breakdowns, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And you did nothing?" Boucher said accusingly.

"Mon Dieu!" Auguste shouted, "I tried to help her, but she wouldn't let me. When she was in the asylum they told me to stay away. What could I do? What has happened, Alfred?"

"Yesterday" For a moment Boucher couldn't go on. Then he cried out, "It was dreadful. She hadn't been out of her studio for weeks, she hadn't eaten for days, her shutters had been closed for

months. Her brother, Paul, told me—the only light was a candle, and she was kneeling and praying before a small plaster statue of the Virgin, which she had done herself. Every so often she fondled it and mumbled, '*La petite amie.*' She didn't know anybody, not even Paul. When he tried to open a window and let in some fresh air, she cringed in a corner, then grew hysterical. When he took her out of the studio, she was terrified and fought like a wild animal."

"He took her to a *maison de santé*?" Auguste asked quietly.

"Yes. She'll get the best care, but it won't help. It's too late." Boucher was weeping as he said, "Auguste, she's incurably insane. I never thought she would be your *petite amie* when I brought her to you."

Auguste's eyes filled with tears. There was so much to say, and all he could say was, "France has lost a fine sculptor." *

Auguste sought to ease his grief by working, but work exhausted him these days. Camille's collapse had aged him. He had frequent spells of nausea and dizziness. He could accept the painful stiffness of his joints, but not the piercing pains in his head that came with terrifying frequency, or the moments of numbness. Always before so robust and energetic, he was unprepared for ill health. He didn't know where his feelings of guilt and sorrow ended and his sickness began. He told no one, not even Rose, determined not to lose control of himself.

He craved peace, but there was no peace. War erupted during the summer of 1914. Within a few weeks the Germans were at the Marne and close to Meudon, and the government ordered him to leave. They could not allow him to be taken prisoner, he was a national asset. He was amused to find himself a possession of France.

As he prepared to leave Meudon with Rose, he took a last look at the "Balzac" in the garden—it was too huge to move on short notice—and he prayed that the Germans would not destroy it and the other sculpture with which his studio was crowded.

Rose was calling, "Hurry, hurry, Auguste. You can hear the guns. They say the Germans will break through at any moment."

He couldn't move. He couldn't desert what he had put his whole life into. She took his arm, and reminded him, "The Germans are very angry with you because you refused to do the Kaiser last year."

* Camille lived until 1943 without ever returning to sanity.

He shrugged. He couldn't worry about the Kaiser's displeasure.

Rose cried, "Do you have enough money?" She handed him a large packet of notes, dirty from much counting.

He counted her savings; they came to more than 10,000 francs. And he pulled out the francs he had hoarded, which also totalled more than 10,000. He chuckled, "You don't trust banks either, do you? We can't get away from our peasant backgrounds." He stuffed all the franc notes in a bulging, untidy lump into the outside pocket of his overcoat.

PARIS was no refuge. There were rumours that the Germans were breaking through at the Marne and would strip the city to the bone, and Auguste was advised by the government to go to England. He was afraid to argue because of Biron and his hopes for the museum; so after a last visit to the Louvre, he left for London with Rose.

He looked forward to viewing "The Burghers" again. A cast of the group had been placed near the Houses of Parliament. Rose was by his side constantly, all in black except for white lace at her throat. She was content as long as she was close to him. But he was homesick in London, and he continued to worry about his work. The news that the Germans had shelled Rheims Cathedral aroused him in a way nothing else had. They were barbarians threatening to erase civilization. He was upset also by a London where all his old friends were dead.

He was thankful when in 1915 he was asked to do a portrait bust of the Pope. He would be following in the steps of Michelangelo; most important, it would be an opportunity to influence Benedict XV, so far distressingly neutral, to see the justice of France's cause.

He arrived in Rome in February. He was surprised to find that the Pope was a small man, but the head was good, with wide cheeks, a thin, decisive mouth, and a strong jaw. He set up his equipment and the Pope said, "You will be brief?"

"I cannot rush, your Holiness."

"I can sit only a few times. I am very busy."

"But this must be a portrait, not a photograph."

The Pope wasn't listening. He insisted on sitting upon a high stand, built like a throne. Auguste felt frustrated, for the Pope was rigid, his pose was artificial, and he was far away. He knew he couldn't touch

the Pope's face to capture the contours as he did with everybody else, but at least he could get closer. He asked the Pope to walk about, and his Holiness was indignant. "The Pope below, the sculptor above, it is not allowed. Now hurry."

At the second sitting Auguste made several heads and in disgust at the superficial way in which he was forced to model wanted to smash them. But when he started to alter the best of the heads, the Pope said, "No, it is a good likeness." Auguste remembered that a finished head of the Pope could remove the objections of devout Catholics in France to the conversion of Hôtel Biron into a Rodin museum.

When he accepted the Pope's judgment, his Holiness smiled and Auguste was encouraged to talk about the war, saying that surely a wise, understanding man like his Holiness knew that the Germans were beasts, and that France was one of the cradles of civilization. A word from the Pope to this effect would carry great weight. The Pope looked solemn, almost shocked, and Rodin felt that he had impressed him.

At the third sitting he started by asking, "Your Holiness, will you speak out against the brutal attack of the Germans on Belgium?"

The Pope replied curtly, "You had better finish. I shall not be able to sit again." Rodin cried, "I have only just begun!"

The Pope stared critically at the head he had approved the previous day. What had been recognizable had been changed back into a mass of clay. He said, "What's this?"

"The truth. Your Holiness, will you tell the truth, too, about the war?" The Pope said coldly, "Monsieur Rodin, you are naive. If you can't finish today, copy a photograph." When he saw Rodin's look of horror, he said, "If that's too difficult, why not copy the portrait bust Count Lipai did of me?"

There was no sense in going on. Auguste stopped working and the Pope, instead of being offended, was grateful. He said, "You will be paid for your materials, monsieur," and left. Auguste decided to finish the bust from memory.

THE WAR had settled down to a stalemate, and Auguste was allowed to return to Meudon. The bust was difficult to finish. Everything was difficult. He worked on a head of Camille as she had been when he

had met her, and on the "Christ," but after many months they remained unfinished.

Often he was forced to lie down to conserve his ebbing energy. He tried to recall Camille's magnificent grey-blue eyes, her fine brow, her delicate mouth, but it was as if even the past was impenetrable. Fatigue threatened to engulf him, but he could not rest. His body hurt no matter how he lay.

He didn't want to worry Rose, for she was ailing also. And when she suggested they take in *petit* Auguste, he agreed. He promised *petit* Auguste room and board and 200 francs a month in return for helping Rose, and avoided him whenever possible. Yet he felt relieved that Rose would have company and less work to do.

He found a huge medieval oak crucifix in Paris and bought it for a few hundred francs. Rose was bewildered; he was not particularly religious and, besides, where would it go?

"In the bedroom," he answered. "It's eighteen feet high and the bedroom is twelve feet high. But I'll manage."

Everyone told him it couldn't be done. He rounded up all the able-bodied men he could find—elderly casters, workmen, neighbours, and *petit* Auguste. Rose warned him not to exert himself, but he pushed and pulled with the rest in his eagerness to get this magnificent piece of medieval craftsmanship upstairs and into his bedroom. He felt like a young man again, and was proud that his hands and arms were still strong. It took hours of backbreaking effort, and he lost his temper and shouted. Many holes were made in the walls, but he didn't care. He ordered other holes to be cut in the floor and ceiling of his bedroom. And while his helpers looked at him as if he were crazy, he had the cross placed against the wall across from his bed, the top going into the attic, the bottom into the dining-room. The superb Christ faced him at eye level.

Rose asked later, "Are you becoming religious, Auguste?"

He shrugged, smiling like a little boy in his gratification, and said, "It is fine sculpture." He adjusted the crucified Christ and felt a stab of pain in his head so fierce that he had to clutch the cross to keep from falling.

Rose asked anxiously, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I feel fine. A little tired." He sat down. A minute later the pain was gone, and he said, "Have the debris cleaned up."

"You do feel better?" Rose didn't want to worry him with her concern, but he was all she had.

"Of course." He forced a smile. "When I look at Jesus and see what He suffered, I can bear my own pain. I'm almost peaceful."

He returned to the bust of Camille, but a few days later while he was driving to finish the head before his strength ran out a wave of darkness swept over him. When he knew where he was again, the chisel was at his feet. He tried to pick it up and couldn't. There was a numbness in his hand. He called Rose and asked her to hand him the chisel.

She did, looking stricken, exclaiming, "You are ill!"

"No, it's just my hand. I hurt it, I think." He tried to hold the chisel again, but it fell to the floor. Rose wanted to call a doctor but he wouldn't let her.

Strength did not return to his hand, and he was unable to work. It had become permanently numb, he realized sadly, but he did not tell anyone, as if it were a disgrace. He spent his days in his studio, observing his work. He thought, viewing "The Age of Bronze," he could do it better now. He was still learning anatomy. He pressed his arm against his sculpture so that he could feel its contour, grateful for this small favour.

He tried to become friendly with *petit* Auguste, but it was not easy. His son was still a boy—he had never matured—and he drank heavily. Auguste mentioned this, seeking to help him. *Petit* Auguste said, "What else should I do? You don't really want me here."

Auguste wondered, Was he actually to blame? All *petit* Auguste cared about was the fortune that he hoped to inherit, but how could he leave it to a shiftless alcoholic?

Rodin's worst pain came from his inability to work. He could not live this way, he told himself. He spent most of his time trying to force life into his numb hand. Whatever he did, it hung limp. Finally in desperation he held his limp hand in his live one and pushed it against the clay, trying to force life into it as he had forced life into his sculpture. He strained desperately, his head throbbing viciously. He would make this hand supple again! He would massage it against the

clay—that would bring life back to it. He pushed harder, harder. The pain increased in his head, but he disregarded it as he had disregarded so much pain, and suddenly there was a blinding flash.

When he knew what was happening again, he was in bed, staring at the Christ hanging on the cross opposite him and hearing a doctor say to a stranger, "He's had a cerebral haemorrhage. We shall have to declare him legally incompetent."

He was not incompetent, he thought indignantly. It was hard to talk and he couldn't move very well, but he could see Rose and Camille and Balzac and Victor Hugo. Hugo had worked until he was eighty, and Rodin was only seventy-five—or was it seventy-six? He wasn't quite sure. They were telling him that he had been ill for weeks, but he didn't remember. They hadn't moved "Balzac," he could see him through his bedroom window.

And now they were introducing him to a stranger, Jean Grite, an official from the Ministry of Fine Arts, who was discussing the museum. "We want to draw up a provisional agreement."

"Provisional? What do you mean by that?" He sat up in bed. Camille, Rose, Hugo were gone. Grite was like all the other officials he had met: polite, knowing, suspicious. He thought, You are all the same; I can't believe a word you say.

"It will be a temporary contract, until we can decide on final terms."

"But I thought there were many objections." He could see the official quite well. Grite was middle-aged, stout.

"Some objections have been withdrawn since you modelled the Pope."

"That's not the only reason you want me to sign a contract," Rodin said suspiciously.

"Well, you've been ill, *maître*, and while you were, much of your work was being stolen from Biron. We want to put a guard on it, but we can't unless it belongs to us—or will some day."

"Oh! So you don't expect me to live much longer."

Jean Grite looked embarrassed and didn't answer.

"Well, I'm not afraid to die. Worse things could happen."

"We are all mortal, *maître*. We shouldn't wait too long."

"Especially since I'm mentally incompetent."

"We didn't say that."

"Legally, mentally, they mean the same thing. And you want my approval and signature while I know what I am doing." Suddenly it was hard to breathe. With a great effort of will he got out of bed, and was surprised to find that there was still life in his legs. Only one arm was numb. He dressed, and said, "What about Madame Rose? I can't leave her penniless."

"A will is being drawn up"

"Without my approval. I'm not dead yet, you know, or crazy!"

"Of course not. The Ministry will suggest its terms, then you suggest yours. We do not intend to leave you unprovided for after your most generous gift."

"Do I owe Clemenceau thanks for this?"

"No. He is out of power, though he may be Premier again if the Germans keep winning. He hates the Germans."

"And Poincaré?"

"He's President. He is deeply occupied with the war, too."

"May I read the agreement?" Auguste asked.

He was signing it when Rose entered. Seeing him smiling, she cried with happiness and took his hands in hers. Jean Grite bowed out with many thanks.

Auguste told Rose, "I'm giving the State all my work."

"I know, *chéri*. How do you feel? Your hands are so cold."

"I've been very ill." He stood up, holding on to the bed.

"But you are better now, I can tell. We will walk a little."

"First we must talk about a will."

"Not now, Auguste!"

"We can't put it off any longer. What about *petit* Auguste?"

She was concerned about him, and Auguste knew it. She said, "You will leave something to the boy."

"I'll leave him three thousand francs a year," he said with a flash of his old vitality. "He would squander any more." When he saw her hurt look, he added, "And the rest of the estate to you, Meudon, all my property."

She cried, "What will I do with it—without you?"

He shrugged and walked slowly to his studio, to gaze at his pieces while he still knew them.

NEGOTIATIONS went on for months between officials of the Ministry of Fine Arts and Rodin's representatives. He grew more feeble daily. Finally, on September 13, 1916, he signed over all his art in France in return for the establishment of a Rodin museum at Hôtel Biron.

He was surprised at how much work there was—fifty-six marbles, fifty-six bronzes, 193 plaster casts, 100 terracottas, over 2,000 drawings and sketches. Also he had hundreds of valuable antiques: Greek and Roman sculpture and ancient Egyptian art. He hoped France would be equally generous with him. Under the agreement Rose would get Meudon and a sizeable income for as long as she lived, but the agreement still had to be passed by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, and there was talk of opposition.

The day after Rodin's bequest to France, despite the growing desperation with a war that was going worse than ever, the Chamber of Deputies passed the bill accepting the gift and establishing the Rodin Museum by a vote of 391 to 52.

Auguste heard the news in silence. There was still the Senate, which was always more conservative.

Several weeks later he was lying in bed with a recurrence of bronchitis, when he was told that President Poincaré had raised objections in the Senate. Poincaré was upset because the agreement guaranteed an annuity for life to a Rose Beuret, when M. Rodin was registered as unmarried. The President declared that this was immoral.

A distressed Jean Grite, who had become deeply committed to the success of the transaction, informed the sick sculptor that there was only one solution. The *maître* must marry Mme. Rose.

Auguste nodded weakly, too exhausted to battle. Papa would be amused; he would be keeping his word after all.

When Poincaré was told, he withdrew his opposition, and the Senate approved the agreement by a vote of 212 to 27, making it final.

The wedding had to be deferred until Auguste recovered from his bronchitis. He refused to be married in bed and Rose insisted on a proper ceremony—she felt it was the least she deserved. Finally, on January 29, 1917, fifty years after *petit* Auguste had been born, they were married by the local mayor. The weather was freezing, they had run out of coal, and the water pipes had burst the night before.

Auguste heard the Mayor ask, "Do you agree to take Rose Beuret as your wife?" and he smiled sardonically and said, "Yes, your Honour."

In her turn, Rose said fervently, "Yes, with all my heart."

Petit Auguste standing behind them as one of the witnesses, was not happy: Rodin still refused to legitimize him.

The day after the marriage, Auguste was coughing violently and it was so cold, because of the shortage of coal, that he and Rose had to stay in bed to keep warm. Auguste, sensing that Rose was even feebler than he was, tried to give her his blankets, but she said he needed them more, though her body felt like an icicle. He begged Jean Grite to get them some coal before they both froze to death. Grite promised to do what he could, but he said the soldiers were freezing, too, every bit of coal was needed at Verdun.

Two weeks after Rose's wedding she was dead from the cold.

Auguste, when he was told, was like stone. He had no tears left; it took energy to cry and he had given it all to his work. Jean Grite, who had become one of the executors of his estate, asked where Rose should be buried.

"Here!" he declared. "At Meudon, beside me!"

"What do you want on the stone, *maître*?"

"Our names and dates. It will be enough. I would like 'The Thinker' to be placed over our graves."

The night before Rose's burial Auguste sat beside the coffin without moving, his hands on hers. And when the time came to close the coffin, he kissed her gently and whispered, "What beautiful sculpture!"

Entering the bedroom a few minutes after the funeral, he came upon *petit* Auguste emptying the stockings, vases and other places where Rose had hidden all her savings. He looked up guiltily, still afraid of the *maître*, sure the old man would be wrathful. Auguste said, "It's your money now. She wanted you to have it."

"Twenty thousand silver and gold francs!" *Petit* Auguste exclaimed.

"There is more in the bank. You will have enough."

Petit Auguste started to apologize for his haste, but he had wanted to make sure he would not be cheated again—then he halted suddenly. His father wasn't listening. Auguste was staring at Rose's things, and thinking never had he felt so lonely.

THE WEATHER improved with the coming of spring and so did Auguste. The next few months he spent every moment he could in his studio. He could not work, not even sketch, and he longed to—he saw so many imperfections now.

If he had only ten more years, he thought, or five—even one—he could do so much now, so much he hadn't been aware of. Just as a man was learning, he reflected sadly, he lost his strength and was taken away. He was unhappy that the war was still going badly, though he had heard that America had come in and should turn the tide. But it was very difficult to live in the present these days. He rarely had visitors. Almost everyone he knew was away or dead.

On November 12, his seventy-seventh birthday, he caught bronchitis again and had to go to bed. He looked at the Christ across the room, and lapsed into unconsciousness.

The next few days as his fever rose and his lungs grew congested he drifted on a vast sea. There were many faces in front of him, Marie, Papa, Mama, Father Eymard, Bibi, Peppino, Lecoq, but where were Camille and Rose? He could not find them. Had they deserted him after all? Then he thought he heard Rose whispering, "What will he do without me?" as she had done just before she died, but everything was grey and he couldn't find her. He recalled his arrangement with Papa about going to the Petite École—what a battle that had been!—and the first nude he had seen, and Marie's defence of Barnouvin, and Rose coming down the street the first time he had seen her, so erect and pretty, and Camille's excitement when they had stayed at Tours. One life, it was not enough, he found himself thinking.

Once again he could see "Balzac" and "Hugo" and "The Burghers" and "The Gates." He had tried to work honestly, not to invent but to observe, to follow Nature: a woman, a rock, a head were all formed by the same principle.

And then he saw the Christ looking at him and many people standing about his bed. He couldn't recognize them, they were too far away, but he thought he heard someone crying. Don't cry, he tried to say, no tears, no tears. He knew it must be Rose. Who else would cry that way?

He felt himself drifting away helplessly without being able to speak. Then he saw hands reaching out to help him: Carrière, Mallarmé,

Lecoq, Papa, Balzac, even Hugo. And now he saw sculpture as far as he could see: "Sorrow," "The Temptation of St. Anthony," "The Crouching Woman," "Psyche," "Mozart," "The Man That Walks," "Misery," the "Last Vision," so many pieces he had forgotten he had done. He lay marvelling at the world he had created, and suddenly he cried proudly, "And people say that sculpture is not a fine art!"

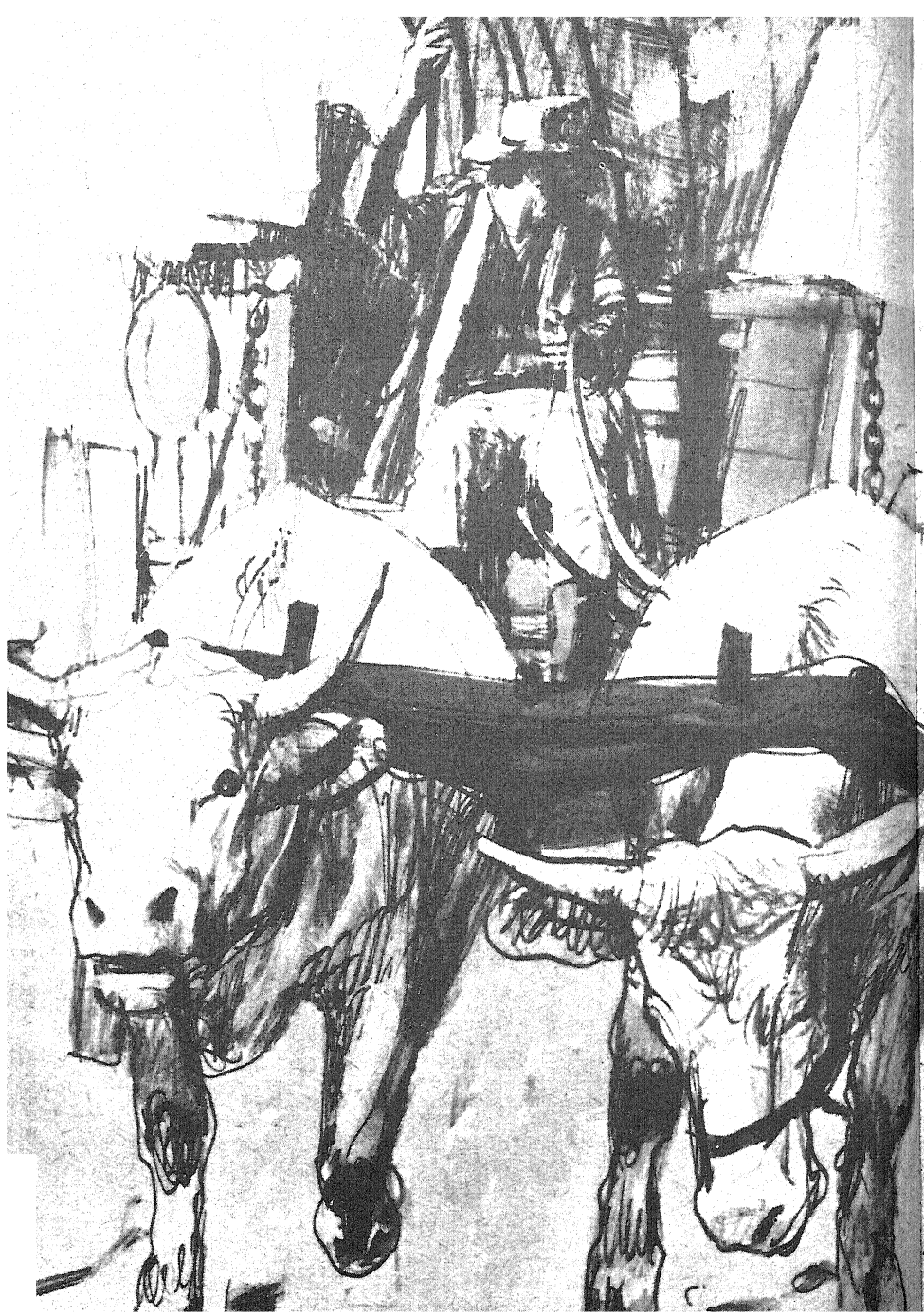
The crying stopped, and he was glad. They must have understood what he was feeling. Nothing terrible was happening. He was only going back into the earth, from which he had come.

He closed his eyes and fell into a dreamless sleep, looking like his own sculpture.

SIX DAYS later, his ancient enemies, the French Academy, elected him one of their immortals.

And in 1963 "The Thinker" was the best-known statue of the modern world. That, perhaps, would have brought one of Auguste's rare smiles.

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GOLD FEVER

AN EPISODE FROM *WHEN THE LION FEEDS*

BY **WILBUR SMITH**

ILLUSTRATED BY AUSTIN BRIGGS

"WHEN THE LION FEEDS" IS PUBLISHED BY HEINEMANN, LONDON

WITWATERSRAND — Ridge of White Waters. It had a ring to it like a hundred million in gold. So thought Sean Courteney as he gazed for the first time on the tents and wagons of the first prospectors littered across the veld. Like these pioneers, Sean and his partner, Duff Charleywood, were staking everything on the precious metal which could bring a man riches or ruin—or even death.

The South African gold rush of the 1880's was tough and colourful, and Sean and Duff—young, handsome and fearless—fitted it to perfection. Sean's taste for a good fight was easily satisfied, and so was Duff's eye for a pretty woman. As the gold boom exploded, a dusty shanty town grew into the proud city of Johannesburg. Sean and Duff grew with it, and excitement and drama followed them all the way to the top—and farther.

This is a rip-roaring adventure story of a kind we seldom see today, a wonderful first novel by a natural storyteller.

"Racily written with plenty of incident and colour." —*The Observer*

"Wilbur Smith seems to have struck gold." —*The Evening News*

THEY RODE north across the bleak South African grassland, climbing steadily towards the Drakensberg range, black, and jagged as sharks' teeth along the skyline. It was cold; wrapped in his *kaross*—his fur blanket—Mbejane trailed far behind his master, Sean Courteney. They had exchanged perhaps two dozen words since they left Pietermaritzburg, for Sean's thoughts were sad ones, and the big Zulu was keeping discreetly out of his way. A man who had just left home for ever was entitled to brood. Mbejane picked a pinch from his small gourd snuff-box and sniffed it delicately.

After dark they crossed a fold in the veld, and rode down towards the lights in the valley below.

Dundee, Sean thought without interest; he could smell the smoke from the coal mine. Sean had not intended to stop here, but when they reached the hotel, in the deserted main street, he hesitated. There was warmth in there, and men's voices, and his fingers were stiff with cold. He climbed down.

"Mbejane, take my horse. Find a place to camp beyond the town and make a fire so I won't miss you in the dark."

Sean went inside. The bar was full of loud-talking men. Miners, most of them—he could see the coal dust etched into their skins. He ordered a brandy and drank it silently, leaning against the bar—a tall broad-shouldered man in his early twenties, with a sense of excitement about him. His hair was black, his skin burnt and brown, and the eyes in his bearded face were as blue as indigo.

A drunk came up to Sean. He was built like Table Mountain, low, square and solid. He had to stand on tiptoe to put his arm round Sean's neck.

"Have a drink with me, *boetie*."

"No thanks." Sean was in no mood for drunks.

"Come on, come on." The drunk staggered and Sean's own drink slopped on to the counter.

"Leave me alone." Sean shrugged the arm away.

"You don't like my face, maybe?" The drunk held it close to Sean's. Sean didn't like it.

"Push off, there's a good fellow." Sean swallowed what remained in his glass and turned for the door. The drunk threw his own brandy in Sean's face. The spirit burnt his eyes and he hit the man in the stomach. The drunk spun sideways and fell.

"What you hit him for?" Another miner helped the drunk to sit up. "It wouldn't cost you nothing to have a drink with him."

Sean felt hostility in the room—he was the outsider.

"This boy is looking for trouble!" a man said.

"Come on, let's sort him out!" another cried.

Sean had hit the man as a reflex action. He was sorry now, but his guilt evaporated as he saw them gathering against him. Gone too was his mood of depression. This was what he needed.

There were six of them facing him. One held a bottle, and Sean started to smile. They were talking loudly, spreading courage, waiting for someone to start it. Then Sean saw movement out of the corner of his eye and jumped back with his hands ready.

"Steady on there," a very English voice soothed him. "I offer my services. You have adversaries and to spare." The speaker stood at a table behind Sean. He was tall and blond, with a gaunt, ravaged face and an immaculate grey suit.

"I want them all," said Sean.

"Damned unsporting." The newcomer shook his head. "I'll buy the three gentlemen on the left if your price is reasonable."

"Take two as a gift and consider yourself lucky." Sean grinned.

The man grinned back. "Very decent of you. May I introduce myself? Dufford Charleywood." He shifted a thin cane into his left hand and extended his right.

"Sean Courteney." Sean accepted the hand.

"What the hell! Aren't you going to fight?" one of the miners said impatiently.

"We are, dear boy, we are," said Duff and moved as lightly as a

dancer towards him, swinging the cane. Weighted with lead, it struck the man's head with a noise like a well-hit ball.

"Then there were five," said Duff, and like a swordsman he lunged at the next miner, while Sean at the same time dived in low, spreading his arms to trip four pairs of legs at once. He sat up in the pile of bodies, punching and kicking. The yelps and thuds gradually petered into silence and Sean stood up, his lip bleeding.

"Drink?" asked Duff.

Sean smiled at the elegant figure. "Brandy, please."

They took the glasses to Duff's table, stepping over prone forms as they went.

"You are travelling?" asked Duff.

"Yes. Are you?"

"No such luck. I'm assistant engineer at Dundee Collieries."

The barman crossed to their table. "Hello, Charlie," Duff said. "Do you require compensation for the damage?"

"Don't worry about it, Mr. Charleywood. Not often we have a good barney like that. Have it on the house. But that's not what I came across for. I've got something I'd like you to take a look at, you being a mining chap." He held out a lump of rock. "What do you make of that?"

Duff peered closely at it. It was a glassy grey, blotched with white and dark red and divided by a broad black stripe. "Some sort of conglomerate." He spoke without enthusiasm.

"Friend of mine says it's gold-bearing. He brought it down from Kruger's Republic the other day. They've made a big strike at a place called Witwatersrand, just outside Pretoria. My friend says the Boers are selling licences to dig for the stuff."

"I'll take it with me, Charlie, and pan it in the morning. Right now my friend and I are drinking."

WHEN SEAN woke next morning he tried to remember where he was. There was a pain in his head, and a noise—a regular croaking rattle. He turned his head. Someone was in the other bed, across the room. Sean groped for a boot and threw it; there was a snort, and Duff's head came up.

"Keep it down to a bellow," Sean whispered. "You are in the presence of grave illness."

A servant came in with coffee. "Send word to my office that I am ill," said Duff.

"I have done so." The servant clearly understood Duff. "There is one outside who seeks the other *nkosi*." He glanced at Sean. "He is greatly worried."

"That's my Zulu, Mbejane. Tell him to wait," said Sean.

They drank their coffee in silence, and then Duff got up and dressed. Sean saw that although as slim as a boy he was finely muscled.

"What does Charlie *put* in his liquor?" Duff complained. He found the lump of rock in his jacket pocket and regarded it sourly; then from a pile of bachelor debris in one corner of the room he took a steel pestle and mortar and a battered black gold pan. He crushed the rock to powder in the mortar, poured the powder into the pan, carried the pan outside to the water tank and filled it.

Sean dressed and followed him, and they sat together on the front step. Duff worked the pan, using a practised dip and swing that set the contents spinning like a whirlpool and slopped a little over the front lip with each turn. He filled it again with clear water. Suddenly he stiffened. Sean saw the gleam through the water and felt excitement prickle up his arms and lift the hair on his neck.

Quickly Duff splashed fresh water into the pan; three more turns and he flicked it out again. They sat staring at the golden tail curved round the bottom of the pan.

"How much money have you got?" Duff asked without looking up.

"Little over a thousand pounds."

"As much as that? Excellent! I can raise five hundred, and I'll throw in my mining experience. Equal partners—do you agree?"

"Yes."

"Then why are we sitting here? I'm going down to the bank. Meet me on the edge of town in half an hour."

"What about your job?" Sean asked.

"I hate the smell of coal—the hell with my job."

"What about Charlie? It's his rock."

"Charlie is a poisoner—the hell with Charlie."

SEAN AND DUFF camped that night in the mouth of a pass with the Drakensberg Mountains standing up before them. They had pushed the pace all that afternoon, and the tired horses turned their tails into the snow-cold wind as they cropped the dry winter grass. Mbejane built a fire in the shelter of a red stone outcrop and they huddled beside it. After they had eaten, Mbejane curled up, pulled his *kaross* over his head and slept.

"How far is it to Witwatersrand?" Sean asked.

"I don't know," Duff admitted. "We'll start through the pass tomorrow—fifty or sixty miles through the mountains—and then we'll be out into the high veld. Perhaps a week's riding after that."

"Are we chasing rainbows?" Sean poured them both coffee.

"I'll tell you when we get there. I've been on gold stampedes before. The first ones in make the killings. We might find the ground for fifty miles around as thick with claim pegs as quills on a porcupine's back." Duff sipped his coffee. "But we've got money—that's our ace in the hole. If we peg a claim we've got capital to work it. If we're too late we can buy claims from men who've gone broke. If we can't—well, there're always other ways of getting gold—a store, a saloon, a transport business."

"Where did you learn mining, Duff?"

"Canada. Oh, I've been around, laddie. For a guinea I'll tell you the story of my life."

"Tell me first. I'll see if it's worth it." Sean pulled his blanket up round his shoulders and waited.

"Your credit is good," agreed Duff. He paused dramatically. "I was born thirty-one years ago. Fourth and youngest son to the sixteenth Baron Roxby."

"Blue blood," said Sean.

"Of course; just look at my nose. My father very early dispelled with a horsewhip any affection his children owed him. We kept out of his way, and eventually my father's horse commendably kicked him in the head. After his death I left home and went to Canada. All that my brothers said was: 'Don't bother to write.' I made money—and spent it—but the cold got to me. I began to think of tropical lands, of sun

and exotic fruit and even more exotic maidens The circumstances that finally decided me to leave Canada are too painful to recall, I left, to say the least, under a cloud So here you see me freezing slowly to death, with a bearded ruffian for company and not an exotic maiden within a days ride "

"A stirring tale, well worth a guinea "

"One story deserves another Let's hear your tale of woe "

Sean's smile slid off his face "Born here in Natal Left home a week ago Also in painful circumstances

He was loath to go on, but under Duff's prompting he resumed, then the words came fast Since leaving school he had done a man's work on his father's cattle farm—and lived a man's life A few years before—1879—he had fought in the Zulu campaign His father had died at Rorke's Drift, and he too would have been killed had his faithful Mbejane not saved him

When he'd got back to the farm, his brother was there before him—and married to a wife who made trouble between them At last there'd been a murderous quarrel So Sean had cleared out—to wander, to follow, now, the path to gold

THE PASS twisted through the sheer, black mountains, they rode in shadow except for the middle of the day Then the mountains dropped away and the high veld stretched away before them, flat and empty, grass and brown grass dwindling to a distant meeting with the pale, empty sky

But the loneliness could not blunt their excitement; each mile covered, each camp along the ribbon road sharpened it until at last they saw the name for the first time Forlorn as a scarecrow, the signpost pointed right to PRETORIA, pointed left to WITWATERSRAND.

"The Ridge of White Waters," whispered Sean It had a ring to it, a ring like a hundred million in gold . . .

They came to a ridge like a hundred others they had crossed and looked down from the top. Another ridge ran parallel, east and west, four miles or so away In the shallow valley between they could see the flash of the sun off the swamp pools that gave the hills their name

Sean groaned, "Look at them!"


AFRICA
SOUTH AFRICA
CAPE TOWN
0 600 MI.
TRANSVAAL
WITWATERSRAND
PRETORIA
JOHANNESBURG
ORANGE FREE STATE
KIMBERLEY
DUNDEE
NATAL
PIETERMARITZBURG
PORT NATAL (DURBAN)
Drakensberg Mts.
Indian Ocean
0 100 200 MI.

Tents and wagons were scattered over the valley, and prospect trenches were raw wounds through the grass in a line down its centre. "That's the strike of the reef—the line where the vein of ore thrusts up towards the surface," said Duff. "And we're too late for a claim—it's all pegged!"

"There might be some spots they've overlooked."

"These boys overlook nothing." Duff prodded his horse and they started down. "Look up there, near that stream. They've got a crushing mill going already, chewing up rock. A four-stamp rig by the looks of it."

They rode into one of the larger encampments of tents and wagons; there were women at work round the fires, and men sitting waiting for their suppers.

"I'm going to ask what's going on," said Sean. He climbed off his horse, and Duff watched with a wry grin as he tried to engage three men in succession in conversation. Each time Sean's victim avoided his eyes, mumbled vaguely and withdrew. Finally Sean came back. "Am I contagious?" he asked plaintively.

Duff chuckled. "They've got gold sickness, and you're a potential rival. You could die of thirst and not one of them would spit on you, lest it give you strength to crawl out and peg something they hadn't noticed." He sobered. "There's an hour left before dark—let's go and have a look for ourselves."

They trotted out towards the trenches. Men were working with pick and shovel there, some of them lean and tough-looking, with a dozen natives working beside them, others fat from an office stool, sweating and gritting their teeth against the pain of blistered palms. All of them greeted Sean and Duff with the same suspicious hostility. Every hundred yards, with sickening regularity, they came across a claim peg with a scrap of canvas nailed to it. Printed in crude capitals on the canvas was the owner's name and his licence number.

They camped after dark on the open windy ridge. "We're too late," Sean said, scowling into the fire.

"Laddie, have you noticed how many of those claims haven't been worked yet? They belong to speculators, and my guess is that they are for sale. Anyway, you need money to work reef gold: money for

machinery, wages, water pipes, wagons. Most of those men we saw are living on hope, not beef and potatoes; despair is starting to show in their faces. In a few weeks you'll see the men sorted out from the boys." Duff lit a cheroot.

"What's that noise?" Sean said. It was a dull tom-tom beat in the darkness.

"You'll get used to that," said Duff. "It's the iron stamping rods on that crushing mill we saw from the high ground. It's a mile or so farther up the valley—we'll pass it in the morning."

They were on the move again before the sun was up and they came to the mill in the uncertain light of dawn. It crouched black and ugly on the smooth curve of the ridge; its jaws thumped sullenly as it chewed the rock; it snorted steam and screeched metallically. Men moved round it, tending its needs, feeding it rock, and fussing about the copper tables over which its gold-laden secretions poured. One of the men came forward.

"We don't want sightseers here! Keep going."

He was a dapper little man with a round brown face and a bowler hat pulled down to his ears. His moustache bristled like the whiskers of a fox terrier.

"Listen, François," Duff said, "if you talk to me like that I'll push your face round the back of your head."

The dapper man came closer. "Duff!" he crowed delightedly. He bounced forward to take Duff's hand and pound his back as he dismounted. Sean watched the reunion with amusement. It lasted until Duff managed to lead the little Afrikaner across to make the introduction: "François du Toit—Sean Courteney." They shook hands.

"Listen, old Duff!" François said excitedly. "I'm just cleaning the amalgam tables. You two go down to my tent. I'll be with you in half an hour—tell my servant to make you some breakfast."

When they were alone, Duff said, "François and I were on the Kimberley diamond fields together. I did him a favour once—pulled him out of a cave-in that had broken his legs. Meeting him here is the answer to a prayer—what he can't tell us about this goldfield no one can."

François soon came bustling into the tent and during breakfast every

exchange began, "Do you remember——" or "What happened to old so-and-so?" Then, when the coffee mugs were filled, Duff asked, "What are you doing here, Franz? Is this your own outfit?"

"No, I'm still with the Company."

"Not Hradsky!" Duff registered mock alarm. "Tha-tha-that's ta-ta-terrible"—he imitated a stutter.

François looked nervous. "Don't do that! My servant speaks English. Do you want me to lose my job?"

Duff turned to Sean. "Stuttering Norman Hradsky and God are equals, but in this part of the world God takes his orders from Hradsky."

"Cut it out, Duff." François was deeply shocked.

Duff went on imperturbably. "Hradsky's organization is referred to reverently as *The Company*. Its full title is the South African Mining and Lands Company. And if it's started here, this must be pretty big."

"It is!" said François, relieved to be on safer ground.

"Tell me about it," said Duff.

"They call it the Rotten Reef—reef means lode, Mr. Courteney—or the Banket—that's a Transvaal word for gold-bearing rock. But in fact there are three reefs, not one. They run up and down the valley."

"All three have pay gold?"

François shook his head. "No, just traces in the outer reef. The Main Reef is a bit better; it's six feet thick in places, but it's patchy." François leaned eagerly across the table. "The bottom reef is the winner. We call it the Leader Reef. It's only a few inches thick and some places it fades out altogether, but there's gold in it like plums in a pudding. You won't believe it until you see it!"

"I'll believe you," said Duff. "Now tell me where I can get some of this Leader Reef for myself."

François sobered instantly; a shutter dropped over his eyes. "It's all pegged," he said. "You've come too late."

"Well, that's that," said Duff.

Silence settled on them. François fidgeted on his stool. Duff and Sean waited quietly. It was obvious that François was wrestling with himself, two loyalties tearing him down the middle. "Have you got any money?" He fired the question with startling violence.

"Yes," said Duff.

"Mr. Hradsky has gone down to Cape Town to raise money. He has a list of a hundred and forty claims that he will buy when he gets back." François paused guiltily. He took an audible breath and went on. "The most likely-looking propositions on Mr. Hradsky's list are a block of claims that belong to a woman. She is willing to sell."

"Yes?" Duff encouraged him softly.

"This woman has started an eating house about two miles from here on the banks of the Natal Spruit. Her name is Mrs. Rautenbach. She serves good food; you could go and have lunch there."

"Thanks, François."

"I owed it to you," François said gruffly.

SEAN AND DUFF went to Mrs. Rautenbach's. It was a corrugated-iron building; a sign above the veranda said:

CANDY'S HOTEL
HIGH-CLASS CUISINE
FREE TOILET FACILITIES
NO DRUNKS OR HORSES ADMITTED
PROPRIETOR MRS. CANDELLA RAUTENBACH

They washed off the dust in the enamel basin which stood on the veranda, dried themselves on the free towel, and combed in the free mirror on the wall. Inside, the dining-room was almost full. Bearded men laughed and shouted or ate silently and hungrily. They found an empty table, and Duff asked the coloured waitress for a menu.

The girl looked at him with amusement. "Today we got steak and mashed potatoes with pudding afterwards."

"We'll have it," Duff said, and the girl trotted back to the kitchen.

The meat was tough but well flavoured, and they ate appreciatively until Sean, who was facing the kitchen, stopped his fork on its way to his mouth. A hush was on the room. "Here she is," he said.

Candy Rautenbach was a tall, shiny blonde, with flawless skin. She filled the front of her blouse and the back of her skirt with a pleasant

abundance. She was not disconcerted by the eyes that followed her but twitched threateningly with a ladle at the first hand that reached out to pinch her. She stopped to chat with someone, but finally she reached their table. Sean and Duff stood up.

Candy blinked with surprise. "Sit down, please." The small courtesy had touched her. "You are new here?"

Duff smiled at her. "We got in from Natal yesterday. This is Mr. Courteney—he is interested in new investments. He thought these goldfields might provide an outlet for some of his capital."

Sean managed to stop his jaw dropping. He quickly assumed the air of a big financier as Duff went on. "My name is Charleywood. I am Mr. Courteney's mining adviser."

She was impressed. "Pleased to meet you. I am Candy Rautenbach."

"Won't you join us for a few minutes, Mrs. Rautenbach?"

Candy hesitated. "I have to go to the kitchen. Perhaps later."

"Do you always lie so smoothly?" Sean asked when she had gone.

"I spoke no untruths," Duff defended himself.

"No, but the way you tell the truth! How the hell am I going to play up to my role?"

"You'll learn. Just look wise and keep your mouth shut. What do you think of her? Palatable, I think."

"Toothsome," Sean agreed.

When Candy came back she immediately started asking Duff sharp questions. It was apparent that her knowledge of mining was well above average and he remarked on it.

"Yes, my husband was in the game." She reached into a pocket of her blue-and-white-checked skirt and brought out a small handful of rock samples.

"Can you name those?" she asked.

It was the direct test—she was asking him to prove himself.

Duff reeled them off: "Kimberlite. Serpentine. Feldspar."

Candy relaxed visibly. "Perhaps Mr. Courteney would care to look at some claims I have along the Banket. The South African Mining and Lands Company is very interested in them."

Sean made his solitary but valuable contribution to the conversation. "Ah yes." He nodded sagely. "Good old Norman."

Candy was satisfied—not many men used Hradsky's Christian name. "Will tomorrow morning be convenient?" she asked.

NEXT DAY she took them out to the twenty claims she had pegged. At a spot where the reef outcropped she said, "I'll leave you two to look round. If you're interested we can talk about it later at the hotel."

Duff escorted her to her horse and helped her into the saddle. He came back elated. "Walk with reverence, Mr. Courteney, for beneath your feet lies our fortune."

They inspected the claim notices, paced out the boundaries and filled their pockets with chips of rock from the outcrop. Then they rode back to their camp—they had pitched a tent near the hotel—and Duff brought out his pestle, mortar and pan. They sat on the bank of the Natal Spruit all afternoon, crushing the rock and working the pan. Finally Duff gave his judgment:

"Well, there's gold, and I'd say it's payable gold. It's not nearly as rich as the sample we panned at Dundee, but that must have been a selected piece of the Leader Reef." He looked seriously at Sean. "I think it's worth a try. If the Leader Reef is underneath there we'll find it; meantime, we won't lose money by working the Main Reef."

Sean tossed a pebble into the stream. He was learning for the first time the alternate thrill and depression of gold fever; the yellow tails in the pan had looked pathetically thin and undernourished to him. "Suppose we can talk Candy into selling her claims—how do we go about things? That four-stamp mill looked a devilishly expensive bit of machinery to me."

Duff punched his shoulder. "Candy will sell her claims—she trembles when I touch her. As for the mill—I once fell in with a rich Cape farmer whose lifelong ambition was to have his own gold mine. He selected what he considered to be an ideal place for it, hired me to run it and purchased the latest and most expensive type of mill. After six months we had recovered sufficient gold to fit into a mouse's ear, so my patron closed the circus down. As far as I know the machinery is still lying there waiting for the first buyer with a few hundred pounds." Duff stood up. "However, first things first. Shall I continue the negotiations with Mrs. Rautenbach?"

"I suppose so." Sean was feeling more cheerful as they walked back to the tent. "But are you sure that your interest in her is strictly line of duty?"

Duff seemed shocked. "My intentions are *only* to further the interests of our partnership. I'll go and see Candy and tell her you've given me authority to act on your behalf." He combed his curly hair, put on the clothes that Mbejane had washed for him, and disappeared in the direction of Candy's Hotel.

It was dawn when he returned.

"Well, what happened?" Sean demanded. "Did you make any progress with the claims?"

Duff yawned. "She'll take a down payment of ten pounds each on her claims and give us an option to buy the lot at any time during the next three years for ten thousand. We arranged that over dinner. The rest of the time was devoted to shaking hands—in a manner of speaking—over the deal. This afternoon you and I will ride to Pretoria and get a lawyer to write up an agreement for her to sign."

Duff and Sean took the agreement to Candy that evening, and sat about anxiously while she read it through twice. She looked up at last and said, "There's just one thing——"

Sean's heart sank and even Duff's smile was strained. It had all been too easy so far. Then Sean saw with surprise that Candy was blushing. "I want the mine named after me."

They nearly shouted with relief. "Very well. Let's call it the Candy Deep," said Duff. "A little premature, I suppose, as we are still at ground level, but pessimism never pays."

"The Candy Deep! That's lovely." Candy flushed again, but this time with pleasure. She scrawled her name across the bottom of the document while Sean fired out the cork of the champagne which Duff had bought in Pretoria.

They clinked glasses and toasted the Candy Deep.

"WE'LL NEED labour, about ten natives to start with. That'll be your problem," Duff told Sean. It was the following morning and they were eating breakfast in front of the tent.

Sean nodded. "I'll get Mbejane on to that right away."

"Good. Meanwhile, you and I will ride back to Pretoria to buy picks, shovels, dynamite and the like. Then we'll move the tent up to the mine, and I'll show you how to get on with things before I head for the Cape to see my farmer friend."

They brought their purchases back from Pretoria in a small ox wagon. Mbejane had done his work well. There were a dozen Zulus lined up by the tent for Sean's approval. He walked down the line, asking each man his name and joking with him in his own language. He came to the last in line: "How are you called?"

"My name is Hlubi, Nkosi."

Sean pointed at the man's well-rounded paunch. "If you come to work for me we'll soon have you delivered of your child." They burst out in delighted laughter, and Sean smiled at them affectionately—proud, simple people, tall and big-muscled, completely defenceless against a jest. "So be it then—sixpence a day and all the food you can eat. Will you sign on to work for me?" They chorused their assent.

It took a week for Duff to instruct Sean in the use of dynamite, to explain how to dig the trenches, and to mark out the mill site and the dump for the ore. Finally he said, "Every day I stay here increases the risk of someone getting that mill before us. Mining machinery is going to be at a premium from now on. I'd better get down to the Cape."

"I was thinking the same thing," Sean said.

The week before, about two dozen wagons had been outspanned round Candy's Hotel. But last night, when they went down to eat a full meal—and so Duff could see Candy—there were at least two hundred. Wood and iron buildings were already beginning to replace the canvas tents, and the whole veld was criss-crossed with rough roads. The restless movement of men and beasts, and the occasional deep crump, crump of dynamite firing in the workings, all heightened the air of excitement that hung over the goldfields.

"I'll leave at first light tomorrow," Duff decided. "Ten days ride to the railhead at Colesberg and another four days by train will get me there. With luck I'll be back in under two months." He looked directly at Sean. "After paying Candy her two hundred pounds and with what I spent in Pretoria, I've only got about a hundred and fifty left. I'll have to pay three or four hundred for the mill, then hire twenty or

thirty wagons to bring it up here. Say, another eight hundred pounds."

Sean looked at him. He had known this man a few short weeks. Eight hundred pounds was the average man's earnings for three years. Africa was a big land; a man could disappear easily.

Sean loosened his money belt and dropped it on to the table.

"Give me a hand to count it out," he said to Duff.

"Thanks," said Duff, and he was not talking about the money. With trust asked for so simply and given so spontaneously, the last reservations in their friendship died.

WHEN DUFF had gone Sean drove himself and his men without mercy. They stripped off the earth and gravel and exposed the reef across the whole length of the Candy claims; then they began to break up the rock itself, stacking it, ready for crushing, next to the mill site. The Zulus sang as they worked, and the dump grew with every twelve-hour day. At night Sean climbed into bed and slept away his fatigue. On Sundays he rode over to talk with François about mining —and picked his brain shamelessly. There was still no trace of the rich Leader Reef, but he had no time to worry about it.

The days turned into weeks, then months. Sean even began to imagine Duff giving the Cape Town girls a whirl with his £800. One evening he rode for miles along the Cape road, questioning every traveller he met. When he returned, he went to a canteen and picked a fight with a big yellow-haired German miner. For an hour they battered each other, surrounded by delighted spectators. Then he and the German shook hands, vowing friendship, and Sean went back to the Candy Deep, his devil exorcised for the time being. He kept away from Candy's Hotel—her shiny blonde hair and peach skin would have been too tempting, and he didn't want to wreck his new friendship with Duff.

The next afternoon Sean was in a fifteen-foot trench marking the shot holes for the next blast, and the Zulus were standing round him, taking snuff before attacking the rock once more, when a familiar voice came from above their heads. "What's going on here? A trade-union meeting?" Duff was looking down at them.

Sean scrambled out of the trench and seized him in a bear hug. "Well, where's the present you went to fetch me?"

"Not far behind, all twenty-five wagons of it. Look."

Duff's convoy was strung out four miles across the veld, most of the wagons double-teamed against the enormous weight of the machinery. Duff pointed to a rust-streaked cylinder. "Seven tons of the most stubborn, evil boiler in the world. If it's broken the wagon axle once, it's broken it a dozen times, not to mention the occasion when it capsized itself in a river."

They mounted, and rode along the line of wagons. "There's so much! Are you sure you know how it all fits together?"

"Leave it to your Uncle Duff. Of course, it's been lying out in the open for a couple of years. But the judicious use of grease, new paint and the Charleywood brain will see the Candy Deep plant breaking rock and spitting out gold within a month."

DUFF WAS wrong: it took much longer than a month. Each bolt they twisted open was red with rust; they worked twelve hours a day chipping, scraping, greasing. And then one day, miraculously, they were finished. Along the ridge, neat and sweet-smelling in new paint, thick with yellow grease and waiting only to be fitted together, lay the mill.

"How long has it taken us so far?" Duff asked.

"It seems like a hundred years."

"Is that all?" Duff feigned surprise. "Then I declare a holiday."

They started at Candy's place, but she threw them out after the third fight so they moved. Others were celebrating—because the day before, old Kruger, the President of the Transvaal Republic, had taken over the mining rights in the goldfields: from now on mining-licence money went to the government instead of to the local farmers. This was an excuse for a party, and the dozen canteens were packed with diggers bare to the waist, salesmen with loud clothes and louder voices, farmers, gamblers and contractors, and drab-suited, bearded Boers drinking little but watching inscrutably the invaders of their land, all listening to the talk of gold.

Candy's coloured girl, Martha, finally found Sean and Duff in a mud-brick hut called the Tavern of the Bright Angels—Duff doing an

exhibition of "The Dashing White Sergeant," partnered by a chair, Sean beating the rhythm on the bar counter. "There's big trouble," Martha told Sean. "Madame says come quickly."

Sean and Duff headed for the hotel. Candy looked at them as they swayed arm in arm in the doorway of her office. "If you two beauties still want to own a mine tomorrow you'd better sober up."

They stared at her, and Sean spoke. "What's the matter?"

"They're going to jump the claims, that's the matter. The fact that this is now a state goldfield has given the drifters the excuse they've been waiting for. About a hundred of them have formed a syndicate—they claim that the old titles aren't legal any more, so they are going to pull out the pegs and put in their own."

Duff walked over and kissed her. "Thanks, my sweet."

"Duff, please be careful!" Candy said as they left.

"Let's hire a few mercenaries," Sean suggested.

They found five armed and willing men in Candy's dining-room. Then, on their way home, they stopped at François's tent. "Going hunting?" he asked when he saw the heavily armed guards.

Duff told him quickly and Sean added, "We don't know which claims they'll go to first. Get your men ready. If you hear shooting our way, come and give us a hand. We'll do the same for you."

Before he had finished, François was hopping with agitation. "The stinking thunders! *Ja, ja*, we'll come all right!"

By the time they reached the Candy Deep it was dark. Mbejane and the other Zulus were cooking dinner, squatting round their three-legged pot. "Get your spears," Sean shouted.

They placed the hired gunmen among the pieces of mill machinery, where they could cover the track that led up to the mine. The Zulus they hid in one of the trenches.

"How much dynamite have we got?" Sean asked.

Duff stared at him a second, then he grinned. "Sufficient."

They buried a case of explosive in the middle of the track, a few hundred yards down the slope, and placed a tin can on top of it to mark the detonator. They spent an hour making grenades out of bundles of dynamite sticks. Then, rifles in their laps, they waited.

"How did Candy find out about this, I wonder?" Sean asked.

"She knows everything—that hotel of hers is the centre of this gold-field and she keeps her ears open."

"Are you going to marry her, Duff?"

"Good Lord! You're mad, laddie. Or is that a joke?"

"She dotes on you and you seem well-disposed towards her."

"Yes, but marriage!" Duff shivered. "Only a fool makes the same mistake twice."

Sean was surprised. "You've been married?"

"With a vengeance. She was half-Spanish, half-Norwegian—cold fire and hot ice. We only did two things well together, and one of them was fight. Finally we parted."

"Perhaps you made the wrong choice—look round and you'll see millions of happily married people."

"Name me one," said Duff. He stood up stiffly. "How late is it?"

Sean pulled out his watch and tilted it to catch the moonlight. "After midnight. It doesn't look as if they're coming."

"They'll come. The question is when."

The lights along the valley faded out one by one, the deep sing-song voices of the Zulus in the trench stilled, and a small cold wind came up. Sometimes drowsing, sometimes talking quietly, they waited the night away. The sky paled, then pinked. Sean stood up and stretched. Then he glanced down the valley and saw them. A black moving blot of horsemen, overflowing the road, lifting no dust from the dew-damp earth, spreading out to cross the Natal Spruit, then bunching together on the near bank before coming on.

"Mr. Charleywood, we have company."

Duff jumped up. "They may go to Hradsky's first."

"We'll see which road they take at the fork. Meantime, let's get ready. Mbejane," shouted Sean, and the black head popped out of the trench.

"Are you awake? They are coming."

The blackness parted in a white smile. "We are awake."

The five mercenaries were lying in the grass, each with a packet of cartridges at his elbow. Sean and Duff crouched behind the boiler. "The can shows clearly from here—can you hit it?"

"With my eyes closed," said Sean.

The horsemen reached the fork and turned without hesitation towards the Candy Deep, quickening their pace as they came up the ridge. Sean rested his rifle across the top of the boiler and picked up the can's silver gleam in his sights.

One of the leading horses kicked over the tin can and Sean fired at the spot on which it had stood. The shot was indecently loud in the quiet morning, and every head among the attackers lifted with alarm towards the ridge. Then the ground beneath them jumped up in a brown cloud. When the dust cleared, there was a struggling tangle of downed horses and men.

"My God," breathed Sean, appalled at the destruction.

"Shall we let them have it?" called one of the hired men.

"No," Duff answered him quickly, "they've had enough." Riderless horses, men mounted and on foot were scattering back down the valley. Sean was relieved to see that only half a dozen men were lying in the road.

"Well, that's the easiest fiver you've ever earned," Duff told the mercenaries. "You can go home to breakfast now."

"Wait, Duff." Sean pointed.

Down at the road junction two leaders were rallying the survivors. The men dismounted and spread out, then started cautiously back up the slope. They hesitated just below the line of boundary pegs, then ran forward, tearing up the pegs as they came.

"Altogether, gentlemen, if you please," called Duff politely, and the seven rifles fired. But the range was long and the thirty or so attackers ran doubled up and dodging. There was a shallow ravine—a donga—running diagonally down the slope, and as each attacker reached it he jumped down into it and fired from its safety. Bullets spanged off the mill parts.

Mbejane's Zulus were adding their voices to the confusion. "Let us go down to them now, Nkosi."

"They are close—let us go."

"Quiet, you madmen, you'd not go a hundred paces against those rifles," Sean said impatiently. "Now let me think."

He peered over the top of the big boiler but ducked as a bullet rang loudly against it, inches from his ear. He put his shoulder against the



boiler—it rocked slightly. "We'll walk down together and lob dynamite into that donga," he told Duff. "Mbejane and his bloodthirsty heathens will roll the boiler in front of us. These other gentlemen will cover us."

He called the Zulus out of the trench and explained the scheme. They chorused their approval and jostled to find a place to push against the boiler. Then Sean and Duff filled the front of their shirts with the dynamite grenades and lit short lengths of tarred rope. Sean nodded to Mbejane.

"Where are the children of Zulu?" Mbejane sang the ancient question.

"Here," answered his warriors, braced against the boiler.

"Where are the spears of Zulu?" Mbejane's voice was shriller.

"Here."

"How bright are the spears of Zulu?"

"Brighter than the sun."

"How hungry are the spears of Zulu?"

"Hungrier than the locust."

"Then let us take them to the feeding!"

"Yebho!" Explosive assent, and the boiler revolved to the thrust of black shoulders.

Ponderously it bumped down the slope and they ran behind it. The fire from the donga rattled like hail against the huge metal cylinder. The singing of the Zulus quickened, climbed excitedly, and became the blood trill. The insane, horrible squealing made Sean's skin crawl, but it inflamed him also. He touched the first grenade with the burning rope, then flung it in a spluttering arc. It burst, and he threw again. The boiler crashed into the donga, and the Zulus followed it; now their assagais were busy. The white men clawed frantically out of the ravine and fled, the Zulus after them. When François arrived with fifty armed diggers the fight was over.

"Take your boys down to the camps. Search them carefully. We want every one of the attackers that got away," Duff told him. "It's about time we had a little law and order on this field."

"But how will we pick out the ones who were in on it?"

"By their scared, white faces and the sweat on their shirts."

François and his men went, leaving Sean and Duff to clean up the battlefield. There were more than a dozen corpses in the donga and on the slope. Two were Zulus. The many wounded they took in a wagon to Candy's Hotel.

WHEN THEY arrived the entire population of the goldfield seemed to be in front of the hotel, packed round the small open space in which François was holding his prisoners. François, almost hysterical with excitement, was sweeping his shot-gun round in dangerous circles as he harangued them. "You thunders!" he screamed. "Stealing our claims!" He caught sight of Duff and Sean. "Duff! We got the whole lot!"

Duff climbed the steps of the hotel, and held up his hands for silence. "There have been a lot of men killed today," he said. "We don't want it to happen again. One way we can prevent it is to make sure that these men get what they deserve." Cheers, led by François. "But we must do it properly. I suggest we elect a committee to deal with this affair and with any other problems that crop up. Say, ten members and a chairman." More cheers.

"Call it the Diggers' Committee," shouted someone.

"All right, the Diggers' Committee it is. Now we want a chairman. Any suggestions?"

"Mr. Charleywood," shouted François.

"Yes, Duff Charleywood."

"Any other suggestions?"

"No," roared the crowd.

"Thank you, gentlemen."

Duff smiled at them. "Now, ten members. . . ."

Sean, François, and the Heyns brothers who owned the Cousin Jock claims were among those elected. Chairs and a table were brought out on to the veranda and Duff took his seat. He hammered for silence, declared the first session of the Diggers' Committee open, and fined three members of the crowd for discharging fire-arms during a meeting. Then, at his request, Sean described the morning's battle.

"Now"—Duff looked at the prisoners—"who speaks for you?"

After a minute of shuffling and whispering, a man was pushed forward. "You can't do this to us," he said. "I mean—them old titles

wasn't legal no more, was they? We just came along as peaceful as you please, then you, you louse— I mean your Honour—dynamited us. We had a right to protect ourselves. I mean, didn't we—sir?"

"A brilliant defence most ably conducted." Duff turned to the committee. "How say you, gentlemen—guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty." They spoke together, and François added for emphasis, "The dirty thunders!"

"We will now consider sentence."

"String them up," shouted someone.

Instantly the mood changed. The mob growled. "Get the ropes!"

Sean snatched François's shot-gun and jumped up on to the table. "So help me, I'll shoot the first one of you that touches them before this court says so." They fell back, still muttering. Sean pressed his advantage. "There's a law against killing in this country. Hang them today and it'll be your turn tomorrow."

"Give them a twist on Satan's roulette wheel," shouted a voice, and the crowd clamoured agreement.

"Round and round and round she goes, and where she stops nobody knows!" roared a black-bearded digger, and the crowd howled.

Duff weighed it up. If they were stopped again they might lose all patience and risk the shot-gun. "All right," he said, "if that's what you want." He faced the terrified prisoners. "The sentence of this court is that you play roulette with the devil for one hour and that you then leave this goldfield. Mr. du Toit will supervise the punishment."

Sean climbed down off the table. The crowd was already carrying the prisoners towards the open veld. "Are you going to watch?" he asked Duff.

"I've seen it done. Once was enough. But go and have a look. I'll be surprised if you stay the hour."

By the time Sean joined the crowd most of the wagons had been gathered from the camps and drawn up in a line. Men swarmed round them, fitting jacks under the axles to lift the big back wheels clear of the ground. Then the prisoners were hustled forward, one to each wheel. Their wrists and ankles were lashed to the rims with their arms and legs spread-eagled. François placed four diggers at each wheel. He shouted, "All right—turn them, *kerels*."

The wheels started moving, slowly at first, then faster as they built up momentum. The bodies strapped to them blurred with the speed. Sean could hear the men retching and gasping. He waited a few more minutes, then walked away disgusted.

PRESIDENT KRUGER wanted no part of policing such a nest of ruffians, but with the Diggers' Committee dispensing rough justice, a semblance of order came to the camps. So far only the Jack and Whistle was turning out gold in any quantity, and, though rumours flew, only Hradsky, who was still in Cape Town, and François du Toit knew how much.

Up at the Candy Deep Duff and Sean worked on relentlessly. The mill took shape on its concrete platform, its jaws open for the first bite at the rock. The boiler was swung up on to its cradle by twenty Zulus. The copper tables were fitted up, ready to be smeared with quicksilver. There was no time to worry about Sean's dwindling store of money. They worked and slept. There was nothing else.

On 20th November they fired the boiler for the first time. Their bodies lean and tempered hard with toil, Sean and Duff stood together and watched the needle creep up on the pressure gauge. At least they had power now.

On 2nd December they fed the mill its first meal and watched the powdered rock flow across the amalgam tables. They were too tired to celebrate. From now on one of them must be in constant attendance on that iron monster, and Duff took the first night shift. The next morning Sean found him weaving on his feet. "By my reckoning we've run ten tons of rock through her. Time to see how much gold we've picked up."

"You go get some sleep," said Sean.

Duff ignored him. "Mbejane, bring a couple of your men here; we're going to change the tables." They switched the flow of powdered rock on to the second table; then with a spatula Duff scraped the mercury off the copper top of the first table, collecting it in a ball the size of a coco-nut. "The mercury picks up the tiny particles of gold," he explained to Sean, "and lets the grains of rock wash across the table and fall off into the dump."

"How do you get the gold out of that ball?"

"You put the whole thing in a retort and boil off the mercury. The gold stays behind."

"Hell of a waste of mercury, isn't it?"

"No, you catch it as it condenses and use it again."

Duff carried the ball of amalgam to the shed which they used as a store-room. He placed the ball in the retort, and lit the blow lamp. With the heat on it the ball dissolved and started to bubble. Silently they stared at it. The level in the retort fell. The last of the mercury steamed off, and there it was, glowing bright yellow. A drop of gold—the size of a pea. Neither of them spoke for a while.

Then Sean asked, "Is that all?"

"That, my friend, is all," agreed Duff wearily. "What do you want to do with it—fill a tooth?" He turned towards the door with a droop to his whole body. "Keep the mill running, we might as well go down with our colours flying."

IT WAS a miserable Christmas dinner at Candy's. The dining-room roared with men's voices and cutlery clatter, while in one corner, marooned on an island of gloom, sat Sean, Duff and Candy.

Duff roused himself. "Tell me again—how much have we got left?"

"Three pounds and sixteen shillings."

"Now, to make me feel really Christmasy, how much do we owe?"

"Oh, please, you two, let's just forget about it for today!" pleaded Candy. "I planned for it to be such a nice party. Look, here's François!"

The dapper du Toit bustled across to their table. "Happy Christmas, kerels. Let me buy you a drink."

"It's nice to see you." Candy gave him a kiss. "Just look at their happy faces." She pointed at Duff and Sean.

"What's wrong, old Duff?"

Duff flashed his lop-sided grin at François. "Three pounds, sixteen shillings, that's what. We're broke. Flat broke."

"*Gott*, I'm sorry, Duff, I thought you were going good. I heard the mill running all this month. I thought you'd be rich by now."

"The mill's been running all right; and we've recovered about enough gold to fill a flea's ear."

"But why, man? You are working the Leader Reef, aren't you?"

"I think that Leader Reef is a bedtime story. We've got one incline shaft down fifty feet—no sign of the Leader."

François peered into his glass thoughtfully. "What I am going to tell you is for you three alone—I'll lose my job if it gets out, you understand?" They nodded. "So far the Leader Reef has only been found at two places. We've got it on the Jack and Whistle, and I know the Heyns brothers have struck it on the Cousin Jock Mine. Let me draw it for you." He picked up a knife and drew in the gravy on Sean's plate. "This is the Main Reef, running fairly straight. Here I am; here is the Cousin Jock; and here you are in between us, along with Doc Sutherland.

"At the far end of the Jack and Whistle the Main Reef and the Leader run side by side two feet apart; but by the time they reach the boundary of the Candy Deep, they've opened up to seventy feet. On the boundary of the Cousin Jock they're back to fifty feet apart. To me it seems that the two reefs form a bow, like this." He drew it in.

"The Main Reef is the string, and the Leader Reef is the wood. The Leader's there in the Candy Deep all right. You just don't know where to look. I'm telling you, Duff, if you cut a trench at right angles to the Main Reef you'll find it—and when you do you can buy me a drink."

When François finished, Duff leaned back in his chair. "If we'd known this a month ago! Now how are we going to raise the money to cut this new trench and still keep the mill running?"

"I'd make you a loan—but with what Mr. Hradsky pays me——" François shrugged. "You'll need about two hundred pounds. I haven't got it."

Candy had been listening and thinking. "Well," she said, "I've just bought ten plots of ground in Johannesburg, that new village down the valley, so I'm short myself. But I could let you have fifty pounds."

"Candy, I love you," said Duff.

"I wish you meant that," said Candy.

Duff went on hurriedly, "We'll need another hundred and fifty or so."

There was a long silence, then Duff started to smile. He looked at Sean. "How are you feeling, laddie? Strong?"

"Yes."

"Brave?"

"Come on, Duff. I don't like that look in your eye."

Duff pulled out a notebook and wrote in it.

Then he tore out the page and handed it to Sean. "We'll put posters like this in every canteen," he said. Sean read it:

ON NEW YEAR'S DAY
MR. SEAN COURTENEY, HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION
OF THE TRANSVAAL REPUBLIC,
WILL MEET ALL COMERS IN FRONT OF CANDY'S HOTEL
FOR A PURSE OF FIFTY POUNDS A SIDE.
SPECTATOR'S FEE 2*s*

Candy was reading it over his shoulder. "That's wonderful! I'll run a buffet luncheon at two shillings a head."

François was not to be outdone. "I'll hang the posters. And I'll send a couple of my chaps down to put up a ring."

"We'll close the mill until New Year's Day—Sean likes to fight, but he'll have to get a lot of rest. We'll put him on light training. No drinking, and plenty of sleep," said Duff.

"It's all arranged then, is it?" asked Sean. "All I've got to do is go in there and get beaten to a pulp."

"We're doing this for you, laddie. So that you can be rich and famous."

"Thank you. Thank you very much."

"How are you feeling?" Duff asked for the sixth time.

"No change since five minutes ago," Sean reassured him.

"We've got the challengers lined up," Duff said. "François is collecting the admission money in my attaché-case. As you win each bout, the stakes will go into it as well. I've got Mbejane stationed beside the hotel. If there's a riot, one of us will throw the bag to him and he'll head for the long grass."

Sean was stretched out on Candy's bed, his hands behind his head. He laughed. "Calm down, man. You're making me nervous."

François came in. "We've collected over fifty pounds already," he

said. "There's a mob up on the roof that haven't paid. Every time I go near them they throw bottles at me." He cocked his head on one side. "Listen to them! They won't wait much longer. You'd better come out before they start looking for you."

Sean stood up. "I'm ready."

François hesitated. "Duff, you remember Fernandes, that Portuguese from Kimberley?"

"Oh no!" Duff anticipated him. "Don't tell me he's here."

"Some of the local boys clubbed in and telegraphed south for him. He arrived on the express coach half an hour ago."

Duff looked at Sean sadly. "Bad luck, laddie."

François tried to soften the blow. "I told him it was first come first served. He's sixth in the line, so Sean will be able to make a couple of hundred quid anyway. Then we can always say he's had enough and close the contest."

Sean said with interest, "This Fernandes is dangerous?"

"They were thinking of him when they invented that word."

"Let's have a look at him." Sean led the way outside. On the veranda the Portuguese stood out like a gorilla in a cage of monkeys. A black mattress of hair completely hid his chest.

"Have you a scale to weigh them with?" Duff asked François.

"No, but I have Gideon Barnard, who's a cattle dealer. All his life he's been judging animals on the hoof."

The crowd opened a path for Sean and Duff and they walked to the ring while hands slapped Sean's back. Jock Heyns, the referee, ran his hands over Sean's pockets. "Just checking," he apologized. "We don't want any scrap iron in the ring."

Then he beckoned to a tall, brown-faced fellow who was leaning on the ropes, chewing tobacco. "This is Mr. Barnard, our weighing steward. Well, what do you say, Gideon?"

The steward hosed a little juice from the side of his mouth. "Two hundred and ten."

Jock held up his hands and got comparative silence. "Ladies and gentlemen, we are privileged to have with us today Mr. Sean Courteney, the heavyweight champion of the Republic——"

"Make it the world, Jock!"

"Who will fight six bouts for a purse of fifty pounds each."

Sustained cheering.

"The first challenger, Mr. Anthony——"

"Hold on," Sean shouted. "Who says he's first?"

Jock Heyns had taken a deep breath to bellow the name—he let it escape with a hiss. "It was arranged by Mr. du Toit."

"If I fight them, then I pick them. I want the Port——"

Duff's hand whipped over Sean's mouth and his whisper was desperate. "Don't be a fool! Take the easy ones first."

Sean clawed off Duff's hand. "I want the Portuguese!"

"He's joking!" Duff assured the crowd. He turned on Sean fiercely. "Are you mad? Fernandes is a man-eater."

"Let him have Fernandes," shouted a man on the hotel roof. It was clear he was about to add another bottle to the argument.

"All right," Jock Heyns agreed hastily. "The first challenger, at"—he glanced at Barnard and repeated after him—"two hundred and fifty-five pounds—Mr. Felezardo da Silva Fernandes."

In a storm of hoots and applause the Portuguese waddled into the ring. Sean had seen Candy at the dining-room window and he waved to her. She blew him a two-handed kiss, and at that instant the time-keeper, Trevor Heyns, hit the gong and Sean heard Duff's warning shout. There was a flash of lightning inside his skull, and he found himself sitting among the legs of the first line of spectators. He shook his head. It was still attached to his body. He felt anger flame up in him.

"Six . . ." counted Jock Heyns.

The Portuguese was standing at the ropes. "Come back, leetle babee, I 'ave some more for you!"

"Seven . . . eight"

Sean gathered his legs under him and charged. With the full weight of his run behind it, his fist thudded into Fernandes' mouth. Then the ropes catapulted Sean back into the crowd once more. But the Portuguese was down.

"You weren't even in the ring. How could you hit him?" protested a spectator who had money on Fernandes.

"Like this!" Sean demonstrated. The spectator sat down heavily and Sean hurdled the ropes. Jock Heyns was half-way through the next

count when Sean lifted the Portuguese to his feet. He balanced him on his unsteady legs and hit him again.

"One . . . two . . . three" Jock Heyns began to count again. This time he managed to reach ten and held up Sean's right arm amid howls. "The winner! Ten minutes for refreshments before the next bout.

"Will the keepers please come and fetch their property?" He gestured towards the reclining Portuguese.

Duff collected the purse and dropped it into the case. Then he led Sean to a chair on the veranda. "Nice going, laddie. Unorthodox, but beautiful to watch."

Mr. Anthony Blair was next. His heart was not in it. He moved prettily, but in the direction best calculated to keep him out of reach of Sean's fists.

"The boy's a natural long-distance champ," someone said.

"Watch it, Courteney, he'll run you to death!"

The chase ended when Sean, now sweating gently, herded him into a corner and there dispatched him.

The third challenger developed a pain in his chest. "I won't be able to fight. What bad luck," he complained cheerfully.

"Exceptionally bad luck," Duff agreed. "You'll have to forfeit your purse money."

"You wouldn't take advantage of a sick man?"

"Try me," Duff suggested pleasantly.

Jock introduced the fourth contestant. "Mr. Martin Curtis. Heavyweight champion of Georgia, U.S.A."

Gideon Barnard had put the American's weight at fifteen stone, the same as Sean's. Sean shook Curtis's hand, and from the touch of it knew he would have a good fight at last.

"Glad to know you." The voice was soft, but the grip hard.

"Your servant, sir." And Sean hit the air where the man's head had been. He grunted as a fist slogged into his chest, and backed away warily. A soft sigh blew through the crowd as they settled down contentedly. This was what they had come to see. The fight flowed smoothly. The sound of bone on flesh, the growl of the crowd, the hoarse breathing of the two men, and the slither, slither of their feet.

"Yaaaa!" Through the half silence ripped a roar like a foghorn. Sean and the American jumped apart and turned, with everyone else, to face the hotel. Fernandes, recovered, was on the veranda. He picked up one of Candy's best tables and tore off two of its legs as though they were the wings of a roasted chicken.

"François, the bag!" shouted Sean.

François snatched it up and threw it high over the heads of the crowd. Sean held his breath as he followed it; then, with relief, he saw Mbejane field the pass and vanish round the corner of the hotel.

"Yaaaa!" With a table leg in each hand, Fernandes charged the crowd that stood between him and Sean. It scattered before him.

"May we finish this some other time?" Sean asked the American.

"Of course. I was just about to leave myself."

Fernandes rumbled to a halt, braced himself and threw. A table leg whirred like a rising pheasant an inch over Sean's head; then Fernandes was again in motion, and the speed that Sean and Duff turned on made Mr. Blair's earlier exhibition seem that of a man with both legs in casts. Fernandes never looked like catching them.

François came up to the Candy Deep just after midday with the news that the Portuguese, after beating up three of his sponsors, had left on the noon coach back to Kimberley.

DUFF AND SEAN kept the mill running. As long as its clunking carried across the valley to the ears of their creditors, all was well. Everyone believed they were working a payable reef and left them alone; but the money they fed into the front of the mill had halved its value by the time it came out of the other side in those pathetic little yellow pellets.

Meanwhile they cut a new trench, tearing into the earth, firing dynamite and, as the last stones dropped back out of the sky, going in again, coughing with the fumes, to clear the loosened rock and drill the next set of holes. The work took longer than they had bargained for, and on 15th February Duff went to see Candy about another loan. Sean watched him walk away down the slope—they had quietly sold the horses a week before—and said a prayer, the first for many years.

Duff came back in the late morning. He stood on the edge of the trench and watched Sean tamping in the charges for the next cut. "That's the stuff, laddie," he said. "Keep at it."

Sean looked up with dust-reddened eyes. "How much?" he asked.

"Another fifty—and this is the last, or so she threatens."

Sean noticed a package under Duff's arm. "What's that?"

Duff grinned. "Prime beef. No mealie-meal porridge today!"

"Meat." Sean caressed the word. "Underdone. Just enough salt."

"And you beside me, singing in the wilderness," said Duff. "Light those fuses, and let's eat."

An hour later they walked side by side along the bottom of their new trench to where the freshly blasted earth and rock lay piled. Sean felt the thrill tingle up his arms and squeeze his lungs. Then Duff's fingers were biting into his shoulder—he could feel them trembling.

It looked like a snake, a fat grey python crawling down one wall of the trench, disappearing under a heap of new rubble and out the other side. Duff moved first. He knelt and picked up a piece of the reef, a big grey mottled lump of it, and he kissed it.

"It must be the Leader. Hey, Duff?"

"It's the end of the rainbow."

"No more mealie meal," Sean said softly, and Duff laughed. Then Sean laughed, and wildly, crazily, together they howled their triumph.

"LET ME hold it again," said Sean. Duff passed him the bar and he held it in two hands. It was the size of a cigar box. "Must be all of fifty pounds! We've retrieved our losses—and more—in two days' working!"

Sean placed the gold bar on the table between them. It shone with little yellow smiles in the lantern light, and Duff leaned forward and stroked it; its surface felt knobbly from the rough casting. "I can't keep my hands off it," he confessed sheepishly.

"I can't either. We'll be able to pay Candy for the claims in another week or two."

Duff patted Sean's arm indulgently. "Listen to me, laddie. We have an option on these claims for three years. Now, tell me, how many people here have any money?"

Sean looked mystified. "Well, we have now. And—and——"

"No one else. That is, until Hradsky gets back."

"What about the Heyns brothers? They've cut open the Leader Reef."

"Certainly. But it won't do them any good until their machinery arrives from England."

"Go on." Sean wasn't quite sure where Duff was leading.

"Instead of paying Candy now, we are going to use this"—he patted the gold bar—"and all its little brothers to buy up every likely claim we can lay our hands on. For a start there are Doc Sutherland's claims between us and the Jack and Whistle. Then we are going to order a couple of big ten-stamp mills, and when those are spilling out gold we'll use it to buy land, finance brick works, engineering shops, transport companies and the rest. I told you before there are more ways of making gold than digging for it."

Sean was staring at him silently.

"Have you got a head for heights?" asked Duff.

Sean nodded.

"You're going to need it, because we are going up where the eagles fly. You are about to be a party to the biggest financial killing this country has ever seen."

"Don't you think it would be best to—well, not try and go too quickly? Hell, Duff, we've only been working the Leader for two days——"

"And we've made a thousand pounds," Duff interrupted him. "All my life I've been waiting for an opportunity like this. We're the first in on this field. We're going to go in and take it."

Next morning Duff persuaded Doc Sutherland to sign away twenty-five claims. The ink was hardly dry on the agreement before he was riding over to see Ted Reynecke, who held the claims on the other side of the Cousin Jock. Within seven days Duff bought more than one hundred claims and committed the two partners to £40,000 in debts.

Sean nursed the mill and bit his nails. "Duff, you're going mad," he pleaded. "We'll lose everything."

"How much have we pulled out of the Candy Deep so far?"

"Four thousand."

"Ten per cent of what we owe in ten days—and with a miserable little four-stamp mill at that. Hold on to your hat, laddie. Tomorrow I'm signing up for the forty claims on the other side of the Jack and Whistle. I would have had them today but that damned Greek is holding out for a thousand apiece. I'll have to give it to him, I suppose."

Sean clutched his temples. "I'm going to bed. I'll have to take your shift again if you're determined to spend tomorrow ruining us."

"That's not necessary. I've hired that Yankee, Martin Curtis—you know, the man you fought. It turns out he's a miner. So you can come to town with me and watch me make you rich. I'm meeting the Greek at Candy's Hotel at nine o'clock."

AT TEN o'clock the Greek had still not put in an appearance. Sean was garrulous with relief. "It's an omen, Duff. God saw us sitting here all ready to make a terrible mistake. 'No,' He said, 'I can't let them do it! I'll have the Greek break a leg. I can't let it happen to such splendid fellows.' "

Duff checked his watch. "Come on, let's go!"

"Yes, sir!" Sean stood up with alacrity.

"We're not going home. We're going to look for the Greek."

They rode across to the Bright Angels, and walked in together. The Greek sat with his back to them, the line of his parting seeming to be drawn with white chalk through the oily black waves of his hair. Sean's eyes switched to the two men who sat at the table with the Greek. The younger one was thin, with smooth olive skin drawn tight across his cheekbones. His lips were very red, and his eyes, fringed with girl's eyelashes, were brown and melting. The other was a man whose body seemed to have been shaped in wax, then held near a hot flame. Rounded shoulders and a pear-shaped body with difficulty supported a domed head. His hair was like Friar Tuck's, thick only round the ears. But there was nothing comical about the flickering yellow eyes.

"Hradsky," whispered Duff. He smiled as he walked across to the table. "Hello, Nikky. I thought we had an appointment."

The Greek twisted quickly in his chair.

"Mr. Charleywood, I'm sorry, I was held up."

"The woods are full of highwaymen." A flush started up from Hradsky's collar, then sank again. "Have you sold?" Duff asked.

The Greek nodded. "I'm sorry, Mr. Charleywood, but Mr. Hradsky paid my price and no haggling. Cash money too!"

Duff's eyes wandered across the table "Hello, Norman. How's your daughter?"

This time the flush flooded Hradsky's face He opened his mouth, his tongue clucked twice, then he closed it again.

Duff smiled at the younger man "Say it for him, Max."

The brown eyes were lowered "Mr Hradsky's daughter is very well."

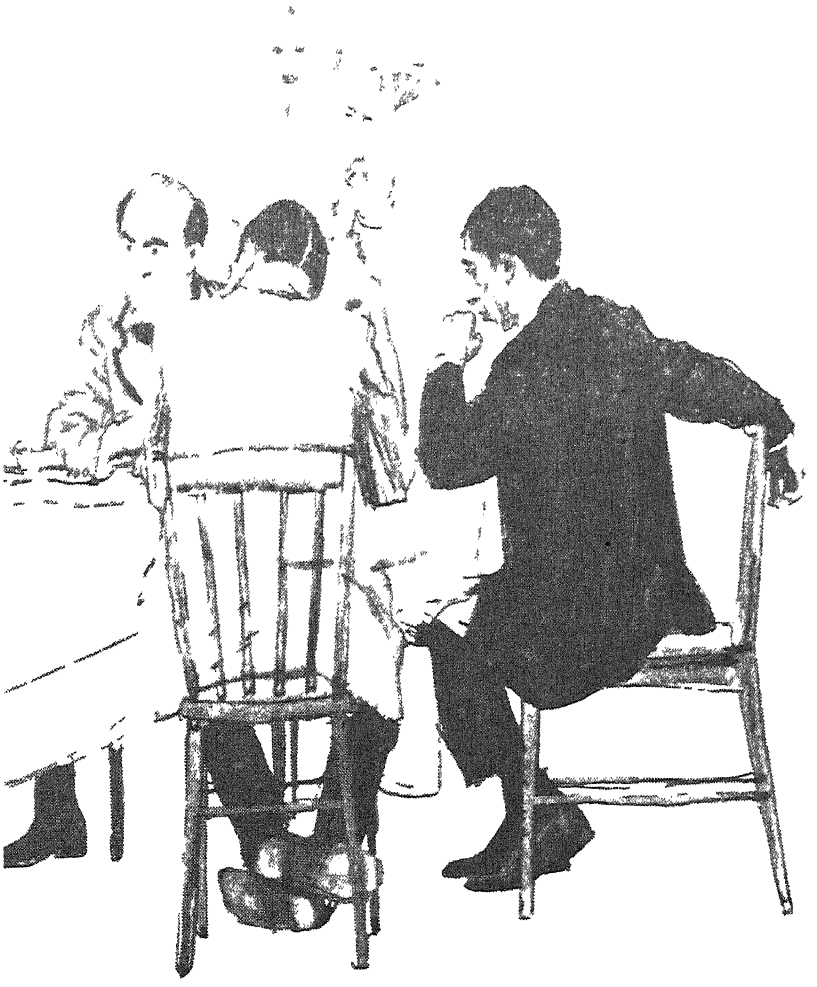
"I believe she married soon after my involuntary departure from Kimberley Wise move, Norman, much wiser than having your bully boys run me out of town That wasn't very nice of you."

No one spoke. "We must get together and have a ch-ch-chat about old times," said Duff



On the way back to the mine Sean said, "If his daughter looks like him you were lucky to escape."

"She doesn't She's like a bunch of ripe grapes with the bloom on them. But don't underestimate Hradsky: his stutter is his only



weakness. With Max—the ever present Max, his court jester—to talk for him, he's overcome that. Beneath that monumental skull is a brain as quick and merciless as a guillotine. Now that he's arrived, we'll have to gallop to keep up with him."

THEIR partnership crystallized over the weeks that followed. Duff, with his magic tongue and charming grin, was the storehouse of mining knowledge, the one who negotiated with impatient creditors, the conceiver of wild or brilliant schemes. But with his fleeting nervous energy he lost interest quickly, and it was Sean who rejected the least likely brain-children and developed the others.

Sean could see why Duff had never found success before; but he recognized that without Duff he himself would be helpless. He watched with profound admiration the way Duff used the barely sufficient flow of gold from the Candy Deep to keep the mill running, to meet the claim moneys as they fell due, and still save enough to pay for the new mills they had ordered from London. He was a man juggling with live coals—hold one too long and it burns. And Duff—deep down uncertain Duff—had in Sean a wall to put his back against. Sean's big body and bigger determination gave him a good feeling—like being on a friendly mountain.

They put up new mill buildings—store-rooms, a smelting house, sleeping cabins. The white mountain of the mine dump grew. The whole valley was changing. Hradsky's new mills stood tall and proud along the ridge until their own dumps dwarfed them. Johannesburg, at first a mere pattern of surveyors' pegs, arranged the scattered encampments in a semblance of order along her streets. The Diggers' Committee had a bridge built across the Natal Spruit. They purchased a water cart for the dusty streets, and prohibited burials within half a mile of the city centre. Sean and Duff, to demonstrate their faith in the goldfield, bought twenty-five plots of ground in Johannesburg at £5 each. And each day the roads from Natal and the Cape brought in more wagons, more men.

One morning Duff came back from town with a telegram. The machinery had arrived. The Heynses' machinery was on the same ship, so Jock and Duff rode down to Port Natal together, hired a hundred wagons, and brought it all back in one load.

When they were washing the dust out of their throats in Candy's bar, Duff challenged Jock: "I'll wager we get our mills producing before you do! Loser pays for the transport on the whole shipment."

"You're on!"

"I'll go further. I'll put up a side bet of five hundred pounds."

Sean prodded Duff in the ribs. "Duff, we can't afford it." But Jock had already snapped up the bet.

ONE OF the mills they placed on the Candy Deep, the other on the new claims beyond the Cousin Jock Mine. They hired two gangs from Johannesburg. Curtis supervised one of them and Sean the other. Each time Duff passed the Cousin Jock, he checked the Heynses' progress.

"They've got the edge on us, Sean, their boilers are up and holding pressure already," he reported fretfully. But the next day he was smiling again. "They didn't mix enough cement in the platform—it started to crumble as soon as they put the crusher on it. They'll have to cast it again."

The betting in the canteens fluctuated sharply. François came up to the Candy Deep one Saturday and reported: "They're giving three to one against you at the Bright Angels. They reckon the Heynses will be finished by next week-end."

"Go down and put another five hundred pounds on for me."

Sean shook his head despairingly, but Duff said, "Laddie, we can't lose. That amateur engineer, Jock Heyns, has assembled his crusher jaws back to front. I only noticed it this morning. He's in for a surprise when he tries to start up. He'll have to strip the whole rig."

Duff was right—they brought both their mills into production a comfortable fifteen hours before the Heyns brothers, and from that time on the money poured in for Sean and Duff. The geological freak that had bowed the Leader Reef away from the Main Reef had at the same time enriched it. François was there one evening when they put a ball of amalgam into the retort. His eyes bulged as the mercury boiled away. "Have you ever seen richer reef, François?" Duff gloated.

François shook his head. "The Jack and Whistle is half as rich."

Their overdraft at the bank dropped like a barometer in a hurricane; the tradesmen started greeting them with smiles. Candy kissed them both when they paid her out in full, plus interest at seven per cent. Then she built herself a new hotel in the centre of town—double-storied, with a crystal chandelier in the dining-room and a magnificent bedroom suite which Duff and Sean rented immediately, with the understanding

that if the Queen ever visited Johannesburg they would allow her to use it. In anticipation, Candy called the suite the Victoria Rooms.

François with a little persuasion agreed to leave Hradsky and take over the running of the Candy Deep. Martin Curtis was the manager of the mill on the new claims—they called them the Little Sister Mine. Although not nearly as rich as the Candy Deep, the Little Sister produced a sweet fortune each month, for Curtis worked as well as he fought.

By the end of August Sean and Duff had no more creditors, the claims were theirs, the mills were theirs, and they had money to invest. They built themselves a two-story office building with stinkwood floors and oak panelling, and let some of its twenty rooms. Then, realizing that the price of land had trebled in three months, they bought 1,000 acres at Orange Grove and another 1,000 round Hospital Hill. More capital went into brickyards which worked twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to try to meet the demand for building materials. Soon their transport business had 400 wagons, plying in daily from Port Natal and Lourenço Marques.

By December there were millionaires in Johannesburg—Hradsky, the Heyns brothers, Karl Lochtkamper, Duff, Sean and a dozen others. They owned the city. They were the aristocracy of the Witwatersrand. A week before Christmas, Hradsky, their unacknowledged but undoubted king, invited them all to a meeting in a lounge of Candy's Hotel. Everyone went, for whatever Hradsky did had the smell of money about it.

Duff and Sean were the last to arrive, and the room was already tense with expectation. Hradsky sagged in an arm-chair with Max sitting quietly beside him. His eyes flickered when Duff walked in, but his expression did not change. When Duff and Sean had found chairs Max stood up. "Gentlemen, Mr. Hradsky has invited you here to consider a proposition."

They leaned forward in their chairs, and Max looked at them with his sad brown eyes. "From time to time," he said, "men in your position wish to find capital to finance further ventures, while those who have money lying idle seek avenues for investment. There has been no meeting place here in Johannesburg up till now for these mutual needs.

Mr. Hradsky has invited you here to consider the possibility of forming a stock exchange." Max sat down and in silence each tested the idea with the question: How will I benefit?

"Ja, it's dom fine idea." Lochtkamper spoke first.

"Yes, it's what we need."

"Count me in."

While they schemed and bargained over fees and rules, Sean watched their faces. Bitter men, happy men, quiet ones and big bull roarers; but all with one common feature—that greedy glitter in the eyes.

It was midnight before they finished. Max stood up again. "Gentlemen, Mr. Hradsky would like you to join him in a glass of champagne to celebrate the formation of our new enterprise."

"This I can't believe," declared Duff. "Quick somebody—find a waiter before he changes his mind."

Hradsky hooded his eyes to hide the hatred in them.

WITH ITS own stock exchange Johannesburg became a city. Even President Kruger recognized that; during the next few years he deposed the Diggers' Committee, sent in his own police force, and revised his tax laws with special attention to mining profits. But despite President Kruger, the city grew, brawling and blustering out into the surrounding veld. Sean and Duff grew with it. Their way of life changed; their visits to the mines fell to a weekly inspection, and their horizons closed in to encompass only the panelled offices in Eloff Street, the Victoria Rooms and the Exchange.

Yet within that world Sean found a thrill that he had never dreamed existed. He realized suddenly that more than 1,500 human beings depended on him for their livelihood. There was satisfaction in the way men looked at him in the street; in the way a path cleared for him and Duff as they crossed the floor of the Exchange each morning to take their places in the leather arm-chairs of the members' lounge. When they talked quietly before the trading began, even the other big fish watched them. Hradsky, the Heynses, Karl Lochtkamper—any of them would have given a whole day's output from their mines in order to overhear their conversations.

"Buy!" said Sean; and "Buy! Buy! Buy!" clamoured the pack. Prices jumped, then slumped back as Sean and Duff sucked their money away and put it to work elsewhere.

Then one March morning Max left the chair at Hradsky's side and crossed the lounge towards them. Almost apologetically, he proffered a loose sheaf of papers.

"Good morning, Mr. Courteney—Mr. Charleywood. Mr. Hradsky has asked me to bring this new share issue to your attention. Perhaps you would be interested in these reports, which are, of course, confidential; he feels the issue is worthy of your support."

You have power when you can force a man who hates you to ask for favours. After that first advance by Hradsky, they often worked together, though Hradsky never acknowledged them by word or look. Each morning, when Duff called an impudent greeting, Hradsky's eyes would flicker and he would sag lower into his chair. But before the bell started the day's trading Max would come over. Their combined fortunes were irresistible; in one wild morning alone, they made £50,000.

An untaught boy handles his first rifle like a toy. Sean was still in his twenties. The power he held was a more deadly weapon than any rifle, and much sweeter, more satisfying to use. At first it was a game, with the Witwatersrand as a chessboard, men and gold for pieces. The consequences were remote and all that mattered was the score—chalked up on a bank statement.

Then suddenly Sean was made to realize that a man wiped off the board could not be laid back in the box like a carved wooden knight. Karl Lochtkamper, the German with the big laugh and the happy face, laid himself open. He needed money to develop a new mine, so he signed short-term notes on some loans, borrowing from men he thought he could trust. He was vulnerable and the sharks smelt him out.

"Where is Lochtkamper getting his money?" Sean asked Max.

"I don't know, but I can guess."

The next day Max came back to them. "He has eight notes out. Here is the list," he whispered sadly. "Mr. Hradsky will buy the ones with a cross against them. Can you handle the rest?"

"Yes," said Sean.

When the notes came due, they called Karl's loans and gave him

twenty-four hours to meet them. Karl went to the three banks in turn.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lochtkamper, we have loaned over our budget for this quarter."

"Mr. Hradsky is holding your notes—I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry. Mr. Charleywood is one of our directors."

Back at the Exchange Karl walked into the lounge for the last time. He stood in the centre of the room, his face grey, his voice bitter and broken. "Let God have no more mercy on *you* when your time comes! Friends! My friends! Sean, how many times haf we drunk together? And you, Duff, was it yesterday you shook my hand?"

Then he went out. His suite in the Great North Hotel wasn't fifty yards from the Exchange. In the members' lounge they heard the pistol shot quite clearly. That night Duff and Sean got drunk together. "Why did he have to do it? Why did he have to kill himself?"

"He didn't," answered Duff. "He was a quitter."

"If I'd known he was going to do that—if only I'd *known*!"

"Damn it, man, he took a chance and lost. It's not our fault. He would have done the same to us."

"I don't like this. It's—it's dirty. Let's get out, Duff. It's different now somehow; it wasn't like this at the start."

"Yes, and it'll seem different to you in the morning."

It *was* different in the morning. There was the usual hurly-burly of work at the office and some tense action at the Exchange. Sean thought about Karl only once during the day and somehow it didn't seem to matter so much. They sent him a nice wreath.

And so Sean faced the reality of the game he was playing. He could get out with the fortune he had already made; but to do that would mean giving up the power he held, and that addiction was already seated too deeply to deny it. He could feel his conscience struggling sometimes, but the struggles became feebler, and Duff always comforted him. He had not yet learned that what Duff said and did was not necessarily what Duff believed.

DUFF STOOD in Sean's office, smoking a cheroot, while they waited for the carriage to take them up to the Exchange. He wore his topcoat, for the winter morning was cold; it fell open at his throat to show

a sparkling diamond in his cravat. "You get used to a woman somehow," he was saying. "I've known Candy only a few years and yet it seems I've been with her all my life."

"She's a fine girl," Sean agreed absently as he scribbled his signature on the document in front of him.

"I'm not getting any younger," Duff went on. "If I'm ever to have a son of my own"

Sean laid the pen down and started to grin.

"Well——" Duff smiled weakly. "The truth is——"

He didn't finish the sentence. Hooves beat urgently in the street outside. There were agitated voices, a quick rush of feet, and Martin Curtis burst into the room. "We've hit a mud rush on the ninth level."

"How bad?" Duff snapped.

"Bad enough—it's flooded right back to Number Eight."

"Damn it! That will take two months at least to clear." Sean paused. "Have you told anyone else in town?"

"I came straight here."

"Get back there immediately," ordered Sean, "but ride quietly—we don't want the whole world to know there's trouble. Don't let a soul off the property. We must have time to sell out."

"Yes, Mr. Courteney." Curtis hesitated. "Cronje and five others were hit by the rush. Shall I send word to their wives?"

"Can't you understand English? I don't want a whisper of this to get out before ten o'clock. We've got to have time."

"But, Mr. Courteney!" Curtis stared at Sean, appalled, and Sean felt the sick little stirring of guilt—six men drowned in treacle-thick mud! He made an irresolute gesture. "We can't——"

But Duff cut in. "They're dead now, and they'll be just as dead when we tell their wives at ten o'clock. Get going, Curtis."

They sold their shares in the Little Sister within an hour. A week later they bought them in at half price. Two months later the Little Sister was back on full production.

THEY SPLIT their land at Orange Grove into plots and sold all but 100 acres. On that they started building a house, pouring into it their combined energy and imagination. Duff hired the horticulturist of the

Cape Town Botanical Gardens to make the whole 100 acres into a garden. The carpets came from Persia, the wood from the Knysna forests on the Cape, the marble from Italy. On the gates they engraved the quotation:

IN XANADU DID KUBLA KHAN
A STATELY PLEASURE DOME DECREE

Each afternoon they would drive up and watch the builders at work. One day Candy came with them, and they showed it off to her like two small boys.

"The ballroom." Sean bowed. "May I have this dance?"

"Thank you, sir." She swept with him across the unsanded boards.

"The staircase," Duff told her next. "Black and white marble. And there on the main landing in a glass case will be Hradsky's head, beautifully mounted, with an apple in his mouth."

They all climbed laughing up the rough concrete.

"My room," said Duff. "I had in mind a solid-gold bath, but Sean says it's vulgar. Look at that view—you can see the whole valley."

"It's lovely," Candy said dreamily.

"It could be your room too."

Candy started to blush and then her face tightened with annoyance. "Sean was right—you *are* vulgar."

She started for the door, but Duff caught her and turned her to face him. "You sweet idiot, that was a proposal."

"Let me go." Near to tears, she twisted in his hands. "I don't think you're funny."

"Candy, I'm serious. Will you marry me?"

Sean's cigar nearly dropped out of his mouth. Candy was standing very still, her eyes on Duff's face.

"Yes or no—will you marry me?"

She nodded once slowly and then twice very fast.

Driving back to town Candy and Duff chattered happily. Sean hunched morosely in one corner. "You'll let me keep the Victoria Rooms, I hope, Candy," he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Duff.

"Two's company," Sean answered.

"Oh no," Candy exclaimed.

Duff spoke sharply. "The house is big enough for all of us."

Candy put her hand on Sean's shoulder. "Please! We've been together so long. We'd be lonely without you." Sean grunted. "Please!"

"Oh, well" He frowned ungraciously.

SEAN FINISHED his breakfast, picked up his gold-headed cane and his topper and went into the hotel yard. Mbejane had the carriage waiting. The body tilted slightly at Sean's increasing weight; the leather upholstery welcomed him with yielding softness. He lit his first cigar of the day. Mbejane smiled at him. "I see you, Nkosi."

"I see you also, Mbejane."

The carriage rolled smoothly out of the yard and into the street. Sean ran his eyes over Mbejane's undulating bare back. He looked out of place in that loincloth of leopard tails. Sean hoped his secretary had remembered to order the livery from the tailor.

They pulled up in front of Sean's offices. His secretary hurried down and opened the door of the carriage. "Good morning, Mr. Courteney!" Sean went up the stairs with the secretary, a greasy-haired little man named Johnson, running ahead of him like a hunting dog.

"Good morning, Mr. Courteney!" A chorus from the desks in the main office. Sean waved his cane at them and went into his own office. His portrait leered at him from above the fire-place and he winked at it. "What have we this morning, Johnson?" he said.

"These requisitions, sir, and the pay-checks, and development reports from the engineers, and" Sean dropped into his chair. He hated office work and so he tackled it with grim concentration. When he had written his signature between the last of Johnson's carefully pencilled crosses, he threw his pen on to the desk. "What else is there?"

"Meeting with Mr. Maxwell from the bank at one, sir, the agent for Brooke Bros. at one thirty, and then you and Mr. Charleywood are expected at the Candy Deep. . . . One other thing." Johnson pointed to a brown paper parcel. "From your tailor."

"Ah!" Sean smiled. "Send my servant in here."

In a moment Mbejane's bulk filled the door. "Nkosi?"

"Mbejane, your new uniform." Sean opened the parcel and produced the gold-and-maroon finery.

Mbejane's eyes were suddenly dead. "This is for me?"

Sean laughed. "Yes, come on, put it on."

Mbejane hesitated; then slowly he dropped his leopard-tail loincloth and buttoned on the jacket and pantaloons.

Sean walked round the Zulu. "Not bad," he muttered. Then in Zulu, "Is it not beautiful?" Mbejane wriggled his shoulders under the cloth and said nothing. "Well? Do you like it?"

"When I was a child I went with my father to trade cattle at Port Natal. There was a man with a monkey on a chain; the monkey danced and the people laughed and threw money to it. That monkey had such a suit as this. Nkosi, I do not think he was a very happy monkey."

Sean stopped smiling. "You would rather wear your skins?"

"What I wear is the dress of a warrior of Zululand."

Sean lost his temper. "You'll wear that uniform," he shouted. "And you'll do it with a smile, do you hear me?"

"Nkosi, I hear you."

Mbejane picked up his loincloth and left the office. When Sean went out to the carriage he was sitting on the coachman's seat in his new livery. All the way to the Exchange his back was stiff with protest and neither of them spoke. Sean glared at the doorman of the Exchange, shouted at Johnson, snapped at the bank manager, routed the representative from Brooke Bros. and drove out to the Candy Deep in a high old rage, scowling at Mbejane's still protesting back. He burst into the administrative building and roared, "Where's Mr. du Toit?"

"He's down the Number Three shaft, Mr. Courteney. He didn't expect you for another hour, sir."

"Well, get me some overalls and a mining helmet." He clapped the tin hat on his head and stamped his heavy gum boots across to the No. 3 shaft. The skip dropped him smoothly 500 feet into the earth and he climbed out at the tenth level. "Where's Mr. du Toit?" he demanded of the shift boss at the lift station.

"He's up at the working face, sir."

Sean set off down the tunnel; the floor was rough and muddy. His

carbide lamp lit the uneven rock walls with a flat white light, and he felt himself starting to sweat. Two natives pushing a tipcart—a cocopan—along the railway lines forced him to flatten himself against the wall. As his ear came near the wall, a puzzled expression replaced his frown of annoyance. The rock was squeaking. It sounded like someone grinding his teeth. He listened, trying to guess the cause. He had never heard anything like it before. He walked on down the tunnel, his bad mood lost in his preoccupation. Before he reached the working face he met François.

"Hello, Mr. Courteney." Sean could not stop François from calling him that. "I'm sorry I wasn't there to meet you."

"That's all right; I'm early. Tell me something—just now I put my ear against the wall of the drive and I heard an odd noise—sort of grinding, like—like pieces of glass being rubbed together."

François's face turned grey. He caught Sean's arm. "Where?"

"Back along the drive."

The breath jammed in François's throat and he struggled to speak, shaking Sean's arm desperately. "Cave-in, man!" he croaked.

He started to run for the lift but Sean grabbed him. "How many men up at the face?"

"Cave-in!" François's voice was now hysterically shrill. He broke Sean's grip and raced towards the lift station. His terror infected Sean and he ran a dozen paces after François before he stopped himself. For precious seconds he wavered, fear slithering like a reptile in his stomach. Then shame drove him back towards the face. The men there were shiny with sweat. Sean shouted the word at them and they came stampeding back along the tunnel.

Sean ran with them, but the mud sucked at his heavy boots and his legs were weak with easy living. One by one the others passed him. He slipped on the greasy footing, scraping his shoulder on the rough wall as he fell, and dragged himself up again. With a crack like a rifle shot one of the thick shoring timbers broke under the pressure of the moving rock, and dust smoked from the roof of the tunnel in front of him. Alone now he staggered on, and all round him the earth was talking, groaning, protesting with little muffled shrieks. The timbers joined in again, crackling and snapping, and he knew that he wasn't

going to make it, but he ran on. Loose rock started to fall about him. Blinded by the swirling dust, he crashed at full run into the abandoned cocopan, and sprawled over it.

As slowly as a theatre curtain the rock sagged down from above, and then, with a roar, the tunnel in front of him collapsed. He dropped to his knees and wriggled under the steel cocopan just an instant before the roof above him collapsed also. The noise of the fall seemed to last for ever, but then it was over except for the rustling and grating of the rock as it settled down. His lamp was lost and darkness pressed as heavily on him as the rock on his tiny shelter.

The air was solid with dust and he coughed until his chest ached. There was hardly room to move but he managed to open his overalls and tear a piece off the tail of his shirt. He held the silk like a surgical mask across his mouth and nose. It strained out the dust so he could breathe. Then the dust settled and his coughing finally stopped. Cautiously he started exploring. He tried to straighten out his legs but his feet touched rock. He felt with his hands—six inches of headroom and perhaps twelve inches on either side, warm mud underneath him, steel and rock all round. He was in a coffin buried 500 feet deep. He felt the first flutter of panic. Keep your mind busy, he told himself; think of anything but the rock around you.

He searched his pockets, moving with difficulty. One silver cigar case with two Havanas. He laid it down next to him. One box of matches, wet. He placed it on top of the case. One pocket watch. One handkerchief, Irish linen, monogrammed. Twenty-five gold sovereigns —he counted them carefully. There was nothing else.

With his possessions laid out beside him and his cell explored he had to start thinking. First he thought about thirst. The mud in which he lay was too thick to yield water. Then he thought about air. It seemed quite fresh and he decided that enough was filtering through the loosely packed rock to keep him alive. To keep him alive—until the thirst killed. Until he died curled up like a foetus in the warm womb of the earth. He laughed, and recognized it as the beginning of panic; he thrust his fist into his mouth to stop himself, biting down hard on his knuckles. It was very quiet; the rock had stopped moving.

How long will it take? Tell me, Doctor.

Well, you are sweating. You'll lose moisture quite rapidly. I'd say about four days, he answered himself.

What about hunger, Doctor?

Oh, you'll be hungry. But it's thirst that will kill you.

Do you think I'll go mad, Doctor, in a few days?

Yes, you'll go mad.

Will it help to go mad?

If you mean, will it make it easier—I don't know.

Well, I may beat the madness. This cocopan may buckle under the tons of rock bearing down on it. . . . Sean picked up a piece of stone and tapped the cocopan with it. It sounded firm enough. A pleasing noise, really. He beat harder on the metal. One, two, three—one, two, three—and then dropped the stone. Soft as an echo, distant as the moon, he heard his taps repeated. His body stiffened and he started to shiver with excitement. He rapped again three times, and three times the answer came back. They heard me. Sweet merciful Lord, they heard me!

MBEJANE waited until Sean disappeared down the shaft before he took off his new jacket. He folded it carefully on the seat next to him. He sat and enjoyed the feel of the sun on his skin for a while; then he lay back and the sun warmed him to sleep.

The shouting in front of the administrative building woke him. He sat up and automatically checked the height of the sun. He had slept an hour or more. It was Mr. Charleywood shouting; Mr. du Toit, mud-splattered and frightened-looking, was answering him. Mbejane climbed off the carriage and listened closely. Something was wrong.

"So you left him in there!" Duff shouted.

"I thought he was behind me, but he went to call the others."

"Have you started clearing the tunnel?"

"No, I was waiting for you to arrive."

"You stupid idiot! He may be alive in there!"

"He hasn't a chance, Mr. Charleywood. He *must* be dead."

"Shut up, damn you!" Duff swung away and started running towards the crowd at the head of the shaft.

Mbejane caught up with Duff. "Is it the Nkosi?"

"Yes. The rock has fallen on him."

Mbejane pushed his way into the skip next to Duff; neither spoke as they dropped to the tenth level. They went down the tunnel only a short way before they were blocked. Men with crow-bars were waiting for orders; Mbejane and Duff shouldered through and stood before the wall of broken rock. Duff turned on the shift boss. "Were you at the face?"

"Yes."

"He went back to call you, and you left him there?"

The man couldn't look at Duff. "I thought he was following us."

"You thought only of your own miserable skin, you filthy little coward, you——" Mbejane caught Duff's arm. They all heard it then —clink, clink, clink.

"It's him—it must be him," whispered Duff. "He's alive!" He snatched a crow-bar and knocked against the side of the tunnel. They waited, their breathing the only sound, until the answer came back, louder and sharper than before. Mbejane took the crow-bar and thrust it into a crack in the rock jam and his back muscles bunched as he heaved. The bar bent like a liquorice stick; he threw it away and went at the stone with his bare hands.

"You," Duff snapped at the shift boss. "Get some timber to shore up as we clear the fall." He turned to the native labourers. "Four of you work on the face at one time. The rest of you carry the stone away as we loosen it." In four hours they cleared fifteen feet of tunnel, breaking the larger stones with sledge-hammers. Duff's body ached and his hands were raw. He had to rest. He walked slowly back to the lift station, and there he found blankets and a huge kettle of soup. "Where did this come from?"

"Candy's Hotel, sir. Half Johannesburg is at the head of the shaft."

Duff huddled into a blanket, drank a little of the soup, and rested for an hour. The first four natives came back to rest and fresh men took their place. When Duff returned to the head of the tunnel Mbejane was still working. Duff watched him curl his arms round a piece of stone the size of a beer keg, brace his legs, and tear the stone out of the jam.

Another two hours and Duff had to rest again. This time he took Mbejane back with him and made him rest and drink some soup. The shift boss brought them a bottle of brandy, and Duff took a swallow and offered the bottle to Mbejane. "It is not fitting," Mbejane

demurred, but Duff insisted, so Mbejane drank, wiped the mouth of the bottle carefully and handed it back.

Duff took another swallow and offered it again, but Mbejane shook his head. "A little of that is strength, too much is weakness. There is work to do now. How long before we reach him?"

"Another day. Maybe two."

"A man can die in two days," mused the Zulu.

"Not one with a body like a bull and a temper like a devil," Duff assured him. Mbejane smiled. "You love him, Mbejane?"

"Love is a woman's word. Are you rested?"

"Yes," lied Duff, and they went back to the face.

SEAN LAY in the mud with his head on the hard pillow of the helmet. He could hear the ring of the hammers and the rattle of falling rock, but it never seemed to come any closer. The air in his little cave was starting to taste stale and his head ached. He moved again, restlessly, in the thick darkness, and his hand brushed the pile of sovereigns. He struck at them, scattering them into the mud. They were the bait that had led him into this trap. Now he would give them and all the millions of others just for the feel of the sun on his face.

Everything—even men's lives—had become unimportant to him compared to power and gold; but now it was his own life teetering on the edge of the black cliff. There were men on the other side of the blocked tunnel trying to save him, working their way into the treacherous rock pile, which might collapse again at any minute. People were so much more valuable than the poisonous metal, the little gold discs that lay smugly beside him in the mud! He thought of Karl Lochtkamper with the pistol to his head, of other men dead or broken because of him.

If I get out of here, it'll be different. I swear it, he thought.

MBEJANE rested for four hours in the next thirty-six. Duff watched the flesh melt off him in sweat. Duff could no longer work with his hands, but he directed the teams who shored up the tunnel. By the second evening they had cleared a hundred feet.

"How long since you last signalled to him?" Duff asked Mbejane.

"An hour. There was then but the length of a spear between us."

Duff took a crow-bar and tapped the rock. The answer came immediately. "He's hitting something made of iron," Duff said. "It sounds as though he's only a few feet away!" Mbejane lifted his bloodstained hammer and swung it against a rock. It cracked and two natives levered it loose with crow-bars. At the back of the hole it left they could see the corner of the cocopan. Duff shouted, "Sean! Can you hear me?"

"Stop talking and get me out of here." Sean's voice was hoarse with thirst and dust.

"They've found him—they've found him." The shouts were passed back to the lift station.

"Nkosi, are you all right?" Duff and Mbejane jumped forward together, their exhaustion forgotten. They cleared the last few lumps of rock, and with shoulders touching knelt and peered under the cocopan.

"Nkosi, I see you."

"I see you also, Mbejane. What took you so long?"

"Nkosi, there were a few small stones in the way."

Mbejane reached under the cocopan and pulled Sean out, while Duff draped a blanket over his shoulders. Then Mbejane picked Sean up and carried him to the lift station and they rode the skip up to the head of the shaft and the waiting crowd.

DR. SYMMONDS, a young and fashionable practitioner, made Sean go straight to bed for fear of pneumonia. When he woke at noon the next day, Candy was in the bedroom, opening the curtains. With her were two waiters with loaded trays. "Good morning! How is our hero?" she said. The waiters put down their trays and went out as she came across to Sean's bed.

Sean blinked the sleep out of his eyes. "My throat feels as though I've just finished a meal of broken glass."

"That's the dust." Candy touched Sean's forehead; then she squeaked as he pinched her. "There's nothing wrong with you!" she said.

"Good, then I'll get up." Sean pulled back the bedclothes.

"Not until the doctor's had a look at you, you won't."

"Where is Mbejane?" Sean asked. "He's been camping on my trail all morning. He wants to see you. Dr. Symmonds said he didn't treat Kaffirs—but we, well, persuaded him to bandage Mbejane's hands."

Sean laughed. "Will you send him in, Candy?"

She went to the door, then stopped, a hand on the latch. "It's nice to have you back, Sean. Don't do anything silly again, will you?"

"That's a promise," Sean assured her.

Mbejane came quickly and stood in the doorway. "Nkosi, is it well with you?" Sean looked at the iodine-stained bandages on Mbejane's hands and at the maroon-and-gold livery. "I sent for my servant and instead there comes a monkey on a chain."

Mbejane stood still, his face expressionless but for the hurt in his eyes.

"Go—find my servant. You will know him by his dress, which is that of a warrior of Zululand."

It took a few seconds for the laughter to start rolling round in Mbejane's belly; then it shook his shoulders. He closed the door very softly behind him, and when he came back in his leopard-tail loincloth Sean grinned at him. "Ah! I see you, Mbejane."

"And I see you also, Nkosi."

They spoke little of the cave-in and not at all of Mbejane's part in the rescue; between them it was understood without words. "Tomorrow, will you need the carriage?" Mbejane asked at last.

"Yes. Go now. Eat and sleep." And Sean reached out and touched Mbejane's arm before the Zulu left him.

Then Duff came in and they breakfasted on eggs and steak. "They tell me François is still down at the Bright Angels," Duff said. "He's been drunk ever since he got out of that shaft. When he sobers up enough to come to the office I'm going to fire him so high he'll only touch ground when he reaches Cape Town."

Sean sat up. "You're going to fire him? What the hell for?"

"What for?" Duff echoed. "For running—that's what for."

"Duff, didn't you say he was in a cave-in at Kimberley, and broke both his legs?"

"Yes."

"I tell you, if it were to happen to me a second time I'd run too. Send down to the Bright Angels, tell him unless he's back at work by tomorrow morning we'll dock it off his pay."

Duff looked puzzled. "What *is* this?"

"I had some time to think down in that hole. I decided that in order

to get to the top you don't have to stamp on everyone you meet."

"Ah, a good resolution. Well, that's all right. You had me worried; I thought a rock had fallen on your head. I also make good resolutions."

"Duff, I don't want François fired."

"All right—he stays on. If you like we can open a soup kitchen at the office and turn Xanadu into a home for the aged."

"Oh, go and burst!" said Sean.

THAT NIGHT Sean woke screaming, for the darkness was on him again and the blankets pressed down on him, suffocating him. He fought them off and stumbled blindly across the room to the balcony, and stood out in the cold air with the moon fat and yellow in the sky above him until he was breathing normally again. He went back inside and lit the lamp and read until dawn showed grey through the windows. Then he dressed, and went out to the stables. "Put a saddle on the grey," he said to Mbejane.

"Where are you going, Nkosi?"

"To kill a devil. I will be back before midday."

He rode up to the Candy Deep, put on overalls and helmet, and went to the No. 3 shaft. "Drop me down to the fourteenth level," he said to the surprised hoistman.

"The fourteenth is abandoned now, Mr. Courteney. There's no one working there."

"Yes, I know." Sean lit his carbide lamp, took a deep breath and stepped into the skip. When he reached the fourteenth level he got out and pushed the recall signal for the skip—and he was alone in the earth again. He walked up the tunnel and the echo of his footsteps went with him. He was sweating, and a muscle in his cheek started to jerk when he reached the face and set the carbide lamp down on a ledge of rock. He checked to make sure his matches were in his pocket, then he blew out the lamp. The darkness came squeezing down on him.

The first half-hour was the worst. Sweat formed cold wet patches under his arms and he had to fight for air. Then slowly, slowly, his mind came under control and he knew he had won. He waited another ten minutes, breathing easily, then lit the lamp. He was smiling as he went back to the lift station and signalled for the skip.

By October, Xanadu was nearly finished. The three of them drove out to it as usual one Saturday afternoon.

"The builder is only six months behind schedule. Now he says he'll be finished by Christmas, and I haven't found the courage yet to ask him which Christmas," Sean remarked.

"It's all the alterations Candy thought up," Duff said.

"Well, if you'd consulted me in the first place it would have saved a lot of trouble," Candy told them. The carriage turned in through the marble gates. Already the lawns were smooth and green, and the jacarandas lining the drive were shoulder-high. Sean spoke with satisfaction. "I think it's going to live up to its name."

"Talking about names," Candy interrupted, "I think Xanadu is a bit outlandish. Why don't we call it Fair Oaks?"

"Firstly because there isn't an oak tree within fifty miles, and secondly because I have already called it Xanadu," Sean said.

"Don't get cross, it was just a suggestion."

They got down from the carriage, and found the head gardener, Joubert, at work. "When are you going to start laying out my maze?" Duff greeted him. The man looked surprised. He glanced at Candy.

"Oh, I told Joubert not to worry about the maze. They're silly things," Candy said. "They just take up a lot of space and they're not even nice to look at."

Sean thought Duff was going to argue—he had wanted his own maze ever since he first saw Hampton Court—but he didn't. They walked across the lawns to the house, and Candy said, "Dufford, I've left my parasol in the carriage—would you mind getting it for me?" When Duff was gone she took Sean's arm. "This place is going to be lovely. We're going to be very happy here."

"Have you two decided on a wedding date yet?" Sean asked.

"We want the house finished first so we can be married here. I think we'll make it sometime in February next year."

Sean glanced over his shoulder and saw Duff coming with the parasol. "Candy, it's none of my business," he said. "I don't know anything about marriage, but I know about training horses—you break them to the halter before you put the saddle on their backs."

Candy looked puzzled. "What are you trying to say?"

"Nothing—forget it. Here comes Duff."

WHEN THEY got back to the hotel they found a note at the reception desk for Sean.

> I should like to meet you and Mr. Charleywood to discuss a matter of some importance. I will be at my hotel this evening and hope that it will be convenient for you to call on me then.
>
> N. Hradsky

Sean passed the note to Duff. "Shall we go?"

"Of course. You know I can't resist Norman's company."

After dinner they walked the two blocks to the Grand National Hotel. When they had almost reached it, Duff spoke.

"Sean—about Candy——" He stopped.

"She's a fine woman," Sean prompted him.

"Yes, she's a fine woman."

"Is that all you wanted to say?"

"Well—oh, never mind. Let's go and see what Hradsky wants."

Max met them at the door of Hradsky's suite. "Good evening, gentlemen, I am so pleased you could come."

"Hello, Max." Duff went past him to where Hradsky was standing in front of the fire-place. "Norman, my dear fellow, how are you?" Duff took hold of the lapels of Hradsky's coat and adjusted them carefully; then he picked an imaginary piece of fluff off his shoulder. "You have a way with clothes, Norman," he said. "I know no one else who can put on a twenty-guinea suit and make it look like a half-filled bag of oranges." He patted Hradsky's arm affectionately. "Yes, thank you, I *will* have a drink." He went across to the cocktail cabinet and poured himself one. "Now, what can you gentlemen do for me?"

Max glanced at Hradsky, who nodded. "I will come to the point immediately," said Max. "Our two groups are the largest on the Witwatersrand. We have worked together on numerous occasions and we have both benefited. The next logical step is to pool our resources."

"I take it that you are proposing a merger?"

"Precisely, Mr. Courteney."

Sean leaned back in his chair and started to whistle softly. Duff took a sip from his glass.

"Well, gentlemen, what are your feelings?" asked Max.

"Have you got a definite proposal worked out, Max?"

"Yes, Mr. Courteney, I have." Max picked up a sheaf of papers from a desk and gave it to Sean. Sean scanned it.

"You've done quite a bit of work here, Max. It's going to take us a day or two to work out exactly what you are offering."

"I appreciate that, Mr. Courteney. Take as long as you wish. I think you will find our offer very generous."

Sean stood up. "We'll be in touch in a few days. Shall we go, Duff?"

Duff finished his drink. "Good night, Max," he said. "Look after Norman. He's very precious to us, you know."

They went to their building in Eloff Street. Sean lit the lamps in his office, and Duff pulled an extra chair up to the desk. By two in the morning they understood the essentials of Hradsky's offer. Sean flopped on to the couch and looked at Duff. "What have you got to say?"

"Let's decide first if we want to join with him."

"If he makes it worth our while, we do," Sean answered.

"I agree with you—but only if he makes it worth our while." Duff lay back in his chair. "What is the first thing that strikes you about this scheme of Norman's?"

"We get nice-sounding titles and fat cash payments, and Hradsky gets control," Sean answered.

"You have laid your finger on it. More than money, Norman wants control, so that he can sit at the top of the pile, look down on everyone else and say, 'All right, what if I do stutter.' " Duff stood up. "Now, do we give him control?"

"If he pays our price, then we give him control," Sean answered.

"You know," Duff said, "I like the idea of being top man myself. But I agree. Hradsky gets control *if* he pays for it—and we'll put him through the wringer until he's dry."

Sean swung his legs off the couch. "Let's leave it now. In the morning we'll tear his scheme to bits and build it up again to suit ourselves."

They had lunch brought to the office next day. Johnson, who had been sent to the Stock Exchange to keep an eye on prices, reported

after closing time: "It's been as quiet as a graveyard all day, sir, but all sorts of rumours are flying about. Someone saw the lights burning in this office at two this morning. Then when you didn't come to the Exchange—well, there were a lot of questions asked."

When neither Sean nor Duff put in an appearance at the Exchange the next morning, more rumours surged round the members' lounge and prices started running amuck. Johnson ran backward and forward between the office and the Exchange all morning. By eleven he was so tired he could hardly talk. "Don't worry any more, Johnson," Sean told him. "Here's a sovereign—go down to the Grand National and buy yourself a drink."

One of Jock Heyn's men, who had been detailed to watch the office, followed Johnson and heard him place his order. He raced back to the Exchange. "Courteney's secretary has just ordered himself a bottle of champagne!" he reported to Jock.

Jock signalled frantically for his clerk. "Buy," he whispered. "Buy every scrap of their script you can lay your hands on."

Across the lounge Hradsky clasped his hands contentedly over the front of his stomach and he very nearly smiled. By midnight Sean and Duff had completed their counter-proposal to Hradsky's offer. "I hope his heart is strong enough to stand the shock." Duff grinned. "And this time we make him come to us. We play him on the home ground."

Hradsky came down to their office at ten the next morning, attended by Max and two secretaries. When everyone was seated, Sean opened the meeting. "Gentlemen, we have examined your proposition and we accept it readily—with the exception of a few minor details which we have listed." He picked up a thick pile of paper. "Perhaps you would care to glance through this privately in Mr. Charleywood's office."

Max accepted the sheaf gingerly, and Hradsky took his band into the next room. An hour later, when he led them back again, they looked like a party of pallbearers. Max seemed on the verge of tears.

"I think we should examine each item separately," he said sadly.

THREE DAYS later they drew up a formal agreement and shook hands on the deal. Duff poured drinks and gave each man a glass. "To the new company: Central Rand Consolidated!"

Hradsky had control but it had cost him dearly.

C.R.C. had its christening party at the Stock Exchange; ten per cent of the shares were put on public sale. Before the day's dealing began the crowd had overflowed the building and jammed the street. The president of the Exchange read the prospectus in a cathedral hush. The starting bell rang and still the hush persisted. Then Hradsky's clerk broke the silence timidly: "I sell C.R.C.'s."

It was bedlam; 200 men tried to buy shares from him simultaneously. First his jacket and then his shirt disintegrated beneath the clutching hands; his spectacles fell and were lost. Ten minutes later he managed to fight his way out and report to his masters. "I was able to sell them, gentlemen." Sean and Duff laughed. They had reason to. In ten minutes, their thirty per cent holding in C.R.C. had appreciated in value by half a million pounds.

XANADU was finished by the end of January and the wedding was set for the twentieth of February. The police put a twenty-four-hour-a-day guard on the ballroom of Xanadu, where the wedding gifts were laid out on long tables. Sean drove up with Duff and Candy on the afternoon of the tenth to count the booty, as Duff put it.

"There are a whole lot of new presents!" Candy squealed. "Here's a solid-gold dinner service from Jock and Trevor!" She picked up one of the plates and hugged it.

Sean examined other new gifts. "Hey, Duff, this one will make you specially happy—'Best wishes, N. Hradsky.' "

"This I must see," said Duff with the first enthusiasm he had shown for a month. He looked, and hooted gleefully. "A whole dozen tea towels. Dear Norman, how it must have hurt him to fork out for them! I'll get him to autograph them."

They left Candy to arrange the presents and went out into the garden. "Why don't you get married too?" Duff asked.

"What for?" Sean looked surprised.

"Well, aren't you letting the old firm down a bit—me going into this alone?"

"No," said Sean. "Anyway, who is there to marry?"

"I'll get Candy to pick you out a suitable female."



"I've a better idea—you let Candy run *your* life and I'll run mine."

"That, laddie, is what I'm afraid is going to happen. She's calling me Dufford already—did you notice? That's what my first wife used to call me. 'Dufford,' she'd say—I can hear it now—'Dufford, you're a pig.'"

ON THE NIGHT of the nineteenth Candy gave them the use of the dining-room and all the downstairs lounges of the hotel for Duff's bachelor party. François arrived with a masterpiece made up in the mine workshops—an enormous ball and chain. This was formally locked on to Duff's leg and the party began.

Afterwards some maintained that the building contractor's £1,000 bill for repairs to the hotel was nothing short of robbery. However, none could deny that the *bok-bok* game, in which 100 men tried to form human pyramids, had done a certain amount of damage to the dining-room; or that the chandelier had come adrift from the ceiling when Mr. Courteney swung for the third time from it. Neither did anyone dispute the fact that after Jock Heyns had tried for half an hour to shoot a glass off the top of his brother's head by exploding champagne corks, the resulting ankle-deep lake of wine made it necessary for the floor to be relaid.

On one point everyone agreed—it was a memorable party.

At first Sean worried that Duff's heart wasn't in it. He stood by the bar with the metal ball under one arm, listening to the ribald comment with that lop-sided grin fixed on his face. But after seven drinks Sean stopped worrying about anything. At midnight Duff talked François into releasing him from his chains, and he slipped out of the room. No one—least of all Sean—noticed him go.

Next morning Sean was tactfully awakened by a waiter with a coffee tray and a note. "What time is it?" Sean asked.

"Eight o'clock, *baas*."

"No need to shout," muttered Sean. His eyes focused with difficulty on the note.

Dear Best Man,

This is to remind you that you and Duff have an appointment at 11 o'clock. I'm relying on you to get him there, whole or in pieces.

Love, Candy

In half an hour Sean felt strong enough to wake Duff. He pushed open Duff's door. The curtains in the room were still drawn and he pulled them open. He turned to the bed, frowning with surprise at the unused pillows and neatly tucked blankets. Then he saw the note propped up on the mantel-piece.

The first the worst, the second the same. I'm not going through with it. You're the best man so make my excuses to all the nice people. I'll be back when the dust has settled a little. D.

Sean read it twice. Then he exploded. "Damn you, Charleywood! 'Make my excuses.' You coward! You'll make your own excuses if I have to drag you back on the end of a rope."

His dressing-gown flapping round his legs, Sean ran down the back stairs to the stable yard. "Where is Nkosi Duff?" he roared to a groom.

"The *baas* took a horse and went for a ride," the man answered. "It was in the night—perhaps seven, eight hours ago."

Sean stared at the groom. "Which way did he go?"

"*Baas,* he did not say."

Eight hours ago—he could be fifty miles away by now. Sean went back to his room. As he dressed he thought about leaving as well—taking a horse and getting as far away as possible. This mess was not of his making—he wanted no part of it. But then he thought of Candy standing alone, waiting while the silence of the wedding guests turned to murmuring. He couldn't let her go through that. He'd have to tell her. He picked up his watch from the dressing table; it was past nine.

He went down the passage and stopped outside Candy's door. He could hear women's voices inside as he knocked. "It's Sean," he said. "Are you decent?"

"Yes. What is it?"

He opened the door. There were two of Candy's friends and the coloured girl Martha. "I have to speak to Candy alone," he said harshly.

They fled, and Sean closed the door behind them. Candy was in a dressing-gown. Her hair was pulled back and hung shiny and soft. She was so beautiful! Sean looked at the frothy pile of her wedding dress on the bed.

"Candy, bad news, I'm afraid. Can you take it?" He spoke almost roughly, hating every second of it. He saw the bloom on her face wither, until her expression was as blank and dead as a statue's.

"He's gone," said Sean. "He's run out on you."

Candy picked up a brush and started stroking it listlessly through her hair. The room was very quiet.

"I'm sorry, Candy." She nodded without looking at him; instead she was looking down the lonely corridor of the future. It was worse than tears would have been, that silent acceptance.

"I wish I could do something." He turned to the door.

"Thank you for telling me, Sean." There was no emotion in her voice; like her face, it was dead.

Sean rode up to Xanadu. Already people were clustered about the marquees on the lawn. The sun was bright and the band was playing; the women's dresses were gay against the green of the lawn. *Gala day*, fluttered the flags above the tents. *Gala day*, shouted the laughter.

Sean spotted François du Toit and Martin Curtis. He gave his horse to a groom and strode across to them. "There'll be no wedding," he said grimly. "Go round and tell everybody. Tell them they'll get their presents back."

They gaped at him. "What's happened?" Curtis asked.

"Just tell them that Candy and Duff changed their minds."

He got on his horse again, and rode out along the Pretoria road until he reached the veld. He cantered off into the sea of grass with his hat pushed back on his head so the sun and the wind could find his face. He sat relaxed in the saddle, and let his horse pick its own way. Towards evening he came back to Johannesburg, feeling better. He ran himself a deep hot bath, and while he soaked, his anger at Duff grew more controlled. He got out of the bath, put on his dressing-gown and went into the bedroom. Candy was sitting on his bed.

"Hello, Sean." She smiled at him, a brittle smile. Her hair was a little tangled now, her face pale and unrouged. She had not changed from the dressing-gown he had seen her in that morning. "You don't mind my coming to see you, do you?" she said.

"No, of course not."

"Oh, Sean," she said, "I'm so afraid. You're the only one who can help him now."

"Help him do what?" asked Sean.

"Find what he is looking for. Peace—himself—whatever you want to call it. He's lost, you know, Sean. He's lost and lonely, almost as lonely as I am. I could have helped him, I'm sure I could." At last, there were tears on her cheeks.

"Duff lost?" Sean asked cynically. "You must be mad!"

"Sean, don't be misled by the big talk and grand manner." She paused. "He hated his father, you know. And the way he revolts at any discipline! His attitude to women, to Hradsky, to life"

Sean tried to defend Duff. "Hradsky did him a dis-service once—he just doesn't like him."

"Oh no, it's much deeper than that. In a way Hradsky is an image of his father. He's so broken up inside, Sean! That's why he clings to you. You can help him."

Sean laughed. "Candy, my dear, we're friends—that's all."

Candy leaned forward. "There's a strength in you, Sean, a solid sureness in you that you haven't discovered yet. Duff has recognized it and so he needs you. He needs you badly. Look after him for me."

"Nonsense, Candy," Sean muttered with embarrassment.

"Promise me you'll help him."

"All right, I promise."

"Thank you, Sean. Good night."

DURING the next weeks Sean was lonely without Duff. He worked doubly hard, but the Rand Club was dreary, thrills at the Stock Exchange less intense. So one Saturday he went along to the Bright Angels with Curtis and François. It would be good to laugh with men who didn't smile while waiting to wipe him out, men who were clean inside —even if there was dirt under their nails.

They ran into the noise from the Bright Angels a block away, and Sean grinned and quickened his step. But when the roughneck crowd saw him standing in the doorway the noise tapered off. When he stood them all drinks, the voices that thanked him were subdued with respect. Later, as he rounded the screen to the washroom, he heard men talking —and stood paralysed. . . . "What's he want to come here for? This isn't the mucking Rand Club!"

"Shh! He'll hear you, man. Do you want to lose your job?"

"I don't give a damn. Who does he think he is? 'Drink up, boys, there's plenty more where that came from. I'm the boss, boys, do as you're told, boys.' The big dandy, with his ten-guinea boots and gold cane! Let him go back where he belongs."

Sean backed out of the door, walked across to François and Curtis, and made his excuses to them. He had dinner with Candy that night and he told her about it. "They didn't want me there. I've never had people feel like that towards me before."

"I'm glad it worries you." She smiled at him. "One day you're going to grow into quite a nice person, Sean. You'll learn that people are important, more important than gold."

Sean looked down at the table. "When I was trapped in the Candy Deep, I made a resolution"—he grinned sheepishly—"never to hurt anyone again if I could help it. I really meant it, Candy, but——"

"That's a big resolution to make—and to keep. I don't think any single experience is enough to change a person—it's more like building a wall brick by brick. You add to it a little at a time. One day you'll finish building your wall, Sean, and it will have no weak spots."

THE NEXT Tuesday Sean rode up to Xanadu for the first time since the day Duff had left. The house felt new and sterile, waiting for people to come into it and bring it to life. In the upstairs corridor he looked at the paintings Candy had chosen. They were soft pastels, woman's colours. He pushed open the door to his own bedroom. This was better—vivid Persian rugs, walls panelled in dark satiny wood

I wish Duff were back, he thought. We could do some real living in this house. He went downstairs into the study and took down a Purdey shot-gun from the gun rack. He brought it up to his shoulder, and felt the true exciting balance of it. He swung the barrels in an arc across the room—and suddenly Duff's face was in his sights. Taken by surprise, Sean stood with the gun trained at Duff's head.

"Don't shoot, I'll come quietly," Duff said solemnly. Sean put down the shot-gun. "How are you, laddie?" Duff said.

"Fine!"

"How's everybody else? Candy, for one."

"Well, you could have damaged her more by feeding her into a stamp mill."

"Bad, hey?"

"Bad," Sean agreed, and they stood in silence for a while.

"I take it that you are not very well disposed towards me either," Duff said at last.

Sean shrugged. "Dufford, you're a pig," he said conversationally.

Duff winced. "Well, it was nice knowing you, laddie. I suppose from here on our paths diverge?"

"Don't drivel, Duff. Pour the drinks and then you can tell me what it feels like being a pig. Also, I want to discuss with you those paintings Candy has plastered along the upstairs corridor. I don't know whether to give them away or burn them." Duff tried to stop the relief showing on his face but Sean went on quickly, "Before we close the subject, I want to tell you this. I don't like what you did. I can see why you did it, but I don't like it. That's my piece. Have you anything to add?"

"No," said Duff. "All right," said Sean.

That evening Sean went down to Candy's Hotel and found Candy in her office. "He's back, Candy."

"Oh!" Candy caught her breath. "How is he, Sean?"

"A little chastened, but not much."

"I didn't mean that. I meant, is he well?"

"The same as ever. He had the grace to ask how you were."

Candy stood up and walked to the window. "I suppose you two will be moving up to Xanadu now," she said. Sean grunted, and she hurried on, "The Heynses will take over the Victoria Rooms—so don't worry about that. I bet you'll have parties up there every night. I don't mind. I'm used to the idea now."

Sean turned her gently to face him. He gave her his handkerchief to blow her nose. "Do you want to see him again, Candy?" She shook her head, not trusting her voice. "Well, I'll look after him, as I promised." He gave her a hug and turned to go.

"Sean," she called after him. "You'll come and see me sometimes? You'll still be my friend, won't you?"

"Of course, Candy. Of course, my dear."

SEAN LOOKED across the board-room table at Duff, seeking his support, but Duff simply blew a thick ring of cigar smoke. So Duff wasn't going to back him up, Sean realized bitterly. They had argued half the previous night. He made one last appeal. "The men have asked for a ten per cent wage increase. They need it—prices have soared, but wages have remained the same. Some of these men have wives and children, gentlemen, and——"

Duff blew another smoke ring and Hradsky looked at his watch

pointedly. Max coughed and interrupted. "I think we've been over that before, Mr. Courteney. Could we put it to the vote?"

Sean watched Hradsky's hand go up against him. He didn't want to look at Duff, but he forced himself to turn his head. Duff's hands were on the table—with Sean's.

"Those in favour of the motion?" asked Max, and Duff and Sean raised their right hands together. "That is thirty votes for, and sixty against," declared Max. "Therefore Mr. Courteney's motion fails. I will inform the Mineworkers' Union of the decision."

Sean walked back to their offices with Duff. "The only reason I supported you was because I knew Hradsky would win anyway," said Duff pleasantly as he held open the door to Sean's office.

Sean kicked the door closed behind them and didn't answer.

"Sean, don't carry this goodwill-towards-men attitude to absurdity. Hradsky's right—we've got to finance all that new development on the East Rand. We can't let production costs creep up now."

Sean exploded. "Damn it, Duff, it's wrong. You know it's wrong. Hradsky knows it's wrong. But what can I do?"

Duff laughed. "Stop trying to change the world and let's go home."

Max was waiting for them in their outer office. He looked nervous. "Excuse me, gentlemen, could I have a word with you?"

"Who's talking," Sean asked abruptly, "you or Hradsky?"

"It's a private matter, Mr. Courteney." Max glanced unhappily at the street door. "I have to speak to you alone."

"Well, speak then," Duff encouraged him. "We're alone."

"Not now. Mr. Hradsky will get suspicious if I don't go back to the hotel immediately." Max was nearly in tears; his Adam's apple played hide-and-seek behind his high collar.

Duff was suddenly very much interested in what Max had to say. "You don't want Norman to know about this?" he asked.

"My goodness, no." Max came closer to tears.

"When do you want to meet us?"

"Tonight, after ten o'clock. There's a side road round the east end of the Little Sister Mine dump. It's not used any more."

"I know it," said Duff. "We'll ride there about half past ten."

"Thank you, Mr. Charleywood, you won't regret it."

Max scampered for the door and disappeared.

Duff prodded Sean in the belly with the point of his cane. "Smell it?" Duff sniffed appreciatively.

"I don't smell a thing," Sean declared.

"The air is thick with it," Duff said. "The sweet smell of treachery."

They left Xanadu at half past nine, Duff wearing a black opera cloak. "Atmosphere is vital, laddie," he said. His zeal was infectious.

They avoided the main streets on their way out of Johannesburg. There was only a minute slice of moon in the sky. The stars, however, were big and by their light the white mine dumps beyond the town stood out, each the size of a large hill. "Here's the road." Duff turned his horse into it and Sean followed him. The Little Sister Mine dump rose up next to them. They skirted it; and then their horses snorted and shied. Max had stepped out from a cluster of bushes.

"Well met by moonlight, Maximilian," Duff greeted him.

"Please bring your horses off the road, gentlemen." Max was still agitated. They tied their horses next to his and walked across to join him among the bushes. "Now before we go any further," Max said, "I want you gentlemen to give me your word of honour that you will never say a word to anybody of what I tell you tonight."

"I agree to that," said Sean.

"Cross my heart," said Duff.

Max opened his coat and brought out a long envelope. "I think if I show you these first it will make it easier to explain my proposition. Here are the latest statements from all the four banks at which Mr. Hradsky deals." Max lit a lantern, and Sean and Duff examined the bank statements in the circle of yellow light. At last Sean got up. "Well, I'm glad I don't owe that much money," he announced. "All right, Max, spell it out for us."

Max took back the sheets and blew out the lantern. He cleared his throat. "The large cash payment that Mr. Hradsky had to make to you gentlemen, and other commitments, have forced him to borrow heavily on his banks, as you have just seen. As security Mr. Hradsky has given them all his C.R.C. shares. For their own safety the banks have valued the shares at thirty-five shillings each, though, as you know, C.R.C.'s are currently quoted at ninety shillings. If the shares

were to fall to thirty-five shillings, the banks would dump every share that Mr. Hradsky owns in C.R.C. on to the market."

"Max," said Duff, "I'm beginning to like the sound of your voice."

"It occurred to me," Max went on, "that if Mr. Hradsky were away —say, on a trip to England to buy machinery—it would be possible for you to force the price of C.R.C.'s down to thirty-five shillings in a few days. You could sell short and start rumours that the Leader Reef had pinched out. As soon as C.R.C.'s hit thirty-five, the banks would unload his shares, prices would crash and you would be able to buy up C.R.C. shares at a fraction of their actual value. There is no reason why you shouldn't gain control of the group and make a couple of million to boot." There was a long silence before Sean asked, "What do you get out of it, Max?"

"Your cheque for one hundred thousand pounds, Mr. Courteney."

"Wages are going up," Sean remarked. "I thought the standard pay for this type of work was thirty pieces of silver."

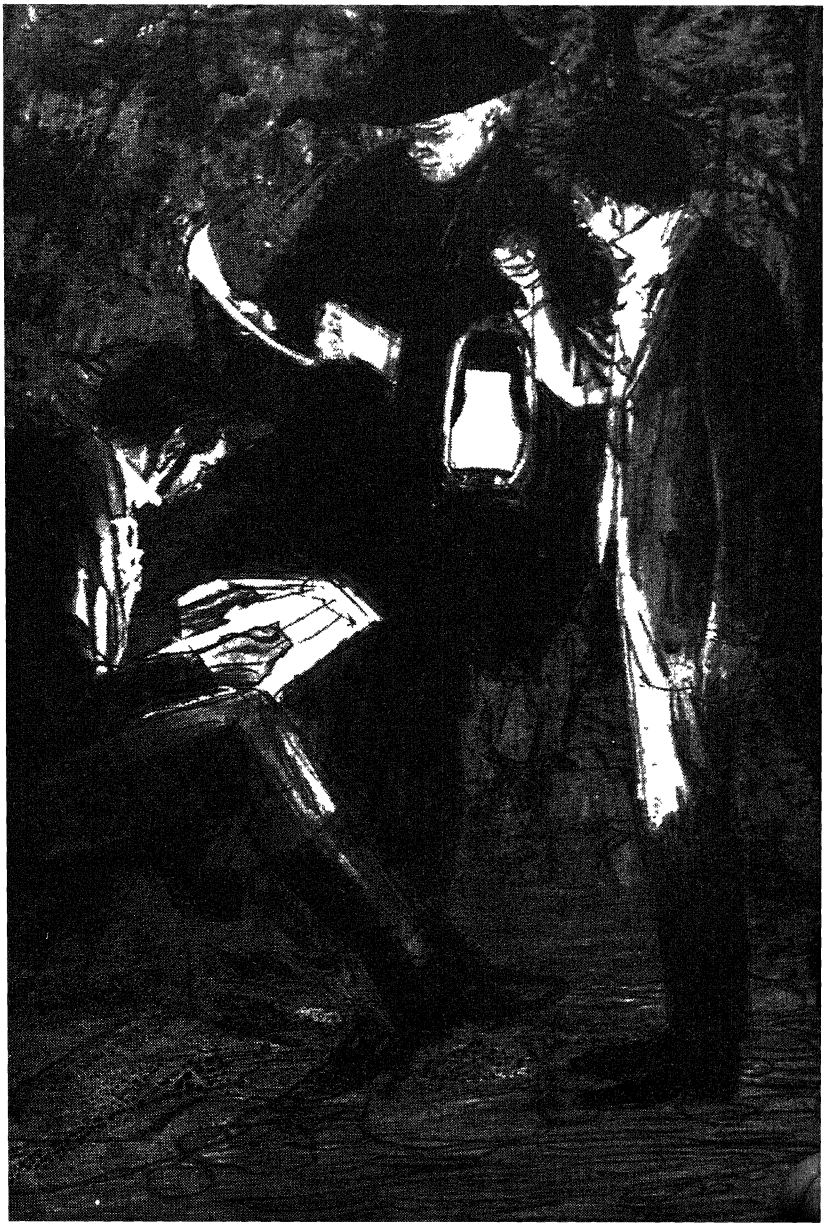
"Shut up," Duff snapped. "Tell me, Max, is that all you want—just the money? You must be a moderately rich man as it is."

Max stood up quickly. His face was in darkness but his voice was naked as he screamed at them: "Do you think I don't know what they call me? 'The court jester,' 'Hradsky's tongue.' Do you think I enjoy crawling to him every minute of every day? I want to be a man again." His voice choked off and his hands covered his face. He was sobbing. Sean couldn't watch, and even Duff looked down in embarrassment. But when Max spoke again it was in his usual soft, sad voice. "Mr. Courteney, if you wear your yellow waistcoat to the office tomorrow, I will take it as a sign that my suggestion and my terms are acceptable. I will then ensure Mr. Hradsky's absence from the country."

He untied his horse, mounted and rode away. The hoof-beats faded into the darkness before Duff spoke. "Those bank statements were genuine. I had a good look at the seals."

"And even more genuine was Max's emotion. It made me feel sick, listening to him. How can a man so cold-bloodedly betray his trust?"

"Laddie, let's not discuss Max's morals. Norman has been delivered into our hands, neatly trussed, with a sprig of parsley. I say, let's cook him and eat him. One, Norman deserves it. Two, if we gain control we



can run things the way we want. You can indulge your good resolution and give everybody a rise—and I'll be top man again!"

Sean nodded, and tugged at his moustache thoughtfully.

"Three," Duff went on, "we came here to make money and we'll never get another opportunity like this. And my last reason but the most potent: you look so beautiful in that yellow waistcoat."

"It *is* rather natty," admitted Sean. "But listen, Duff, I don't want another Lochtkamper business."

"Norman's a big boy, he wouldn't do that. Anyway, he'll still be rich—he's got his diamond mines."

THERE WAS no problem in arranging for Hradsky's absence—someone had to go to London to buy machinery for the new mines on the East Rand and, not ungraciously, Hradsky let himself be elected for the job.

A week later he left with Max on the morning coach for Port Natal. Sean and Duff watched them out of sight, then crossed the street to the office. "I had a word with Max last night," Sean told Duff. "He will send us a telegram from Port Natal when he and Hradsky are safely on the mail-boat. We won't start any rumours until we receive it."

It was another ten days before Max's telegram arrived: SAILING FOUR O'CLOCK THIS AFTERNOON GOOD LUCK MAX.

"I'll drink to that." They were lunching at the Rand Club and Duff lifted his glass. Sean smiled. "Look who's just going into the lavatories. That's Elliott, the editor of the *Rand Mail*. Come with me!"

Duff followed Sean into the men's lavatories. The door of one of the closets was closed. Sean winked at Duff and began washing his hands. "Well, all we can hope for now, Duff, is that Norman will be able to work a miracle in England."

Duff picked up his cue. "We're taking a hell of a chance relying on that. I still say we should sell out now. C.R.C.'s were at ninety-one shillings this morning so it's obvious that the story hasn't leaked out yet. But when it does——!"

Sean took Duff's arm and led him towards the lavatory door. Then he added the cherry to the top of the pie. "If and when C.R.C. collapses, there are going to be thousands of men out of work—do you realize that?" He closed the door and they grinned at each other.

The next morning Sean reached at once for the newspaper on his breakfast tray. The story was on the front page:

IS ALL WELL WITH CENTRAL RAND CONSOLIDATED?
NORMAN HRADSKY'S MYSTERY JOURNEY

The story itself was a masterpiece of journalistic evasion. "It is suggested" "Usually reliable sources report . . ." and "There is reason to believe"

Sean groped for his slippers and padded down the corridor to Duff's room. He handed Duff the paper and watched his face crease into laughter lines before he spoke: "You'd better get down to the editor's office and shout at him a little, just to confirm his suspicions. I'll go up to the Candy Deep and tell François to close the bottom levels and allow no one in. I'll meet you at the Exchange at opening time. And clean that grin off your face! Try to look haggard."

When Sean arrived at the Stock Exchange the crowd had filled the street outside. He scowled straight ahead and ignored the questions which were shouted at him as he hurried through the double doors. Duff was there ahead of him, the centre of a turbulent circle of members and brokers. Sean's hat was knocked forward over his eyes as a man caught hold of his lapels. "Is it true? We've got a right to know!"

Sean sent the man tottering backward into the arms of those behind him. "I'll make a statement later," he roared. He stalked across to join Duff. Grim-faced, they walked into the members' lounge.

"How's it going at your end?" Duff kept his voice low.

"Couldn't be better." Sean contrived a worried expression. "I've got an armed guard on the fourteenth level of the Candy Deep. When they hear about that they'll start frothing at the mouth."

"When you make your statement, let it ring with obvious false confidence," Duff said. "If this goes on we'll have the shares down to thirty-five shillings within an hour of opening."

Five minutes before opening time Sean stood in the president's box and made his address to his fellow members. His hearty assurances and verbal sidestepping were enough to strike despair into the most hardened optimists. When the bell rang, the first tentative offer was: "I sell C.R.C." But there was no rush to buy. Ten minutes later a

sale was recorded at eighty-five shillings, six shillings lower than the previous day's closing price. Duff leaned across to Sean. "We'll have to start selling some of our own shares to get things moving. Otherwise everybody's going to keep sitting on the fence."

Sean nodded. "We'll buy them back later at a quarter of the price, but wait until the news about the Candy Deep gets out."

It was just before ten o'clock when that happened. The reaction was sharp: C.R.C.'s dropped to sixty shillings. But there they hung, fluctuating nervously. "They are short of shares," Duff whispered. "We'll have to sell now. Otherwise the price will stick here."

Sean felt his hands trembling and he clenched them in his pockets. Duff was showing signs of the strain as well. "Don't overdo it," Sean said. "Sell thirty thousand."

The price of C.R.C.'s sagged, but levelled out at forty-five shillings. There was still another hour until closing and Sean's whole body was screwed up tight with tension. "Sell another thirty thousand," he ordered his clerk. It was no longer necessary for either Sean or Duff to act worried. This time the price stuck at forty shillings, and the sale of 60,000 more of their shares failed to move it down significantly.

"Someone's buying," Sean muttered uneasily.

"It looks like it," Duff agreed.

At closing time Duff and Sean had sold a good part of their holdings in C.R.C.'s and the price still stood stubbornly at thirty-seven, tantalizingly close to the magic figure of thirty-five that would flood the market with Hradsky's shares. Duff and Sean were left sitting limply in their arm-chairs. Sean put his hand on Duff's shoulder. "Tomorrow it will be all right," he said. They looked at each other and they exchanged strength, each drawing it from the other, until they were both smiling. Sean stood up. "Come on, let's go home."

Next morning the crowd was outside the Stock Exchange again. They forced their way into the building and took their usual seats in the members' lounge. Sean looked round at the faces of his fellow members. In each of them were the marks of worry. He watched Jock Heyns yawn widely and had to do the same; in later years he would see men yawn like that while they waited for the dawn to send them against the Boer guns. Duff leaned across to Sean.

"As soon as the trading starts, we'll sell. Try and panic them."

Sean nodded. "We'll dump the rest of our shares. I don't see how the price can possibly hold after that."

Duff beckoned to their authorized clerk and told him to sell 100,000 C.R.C.'s at the best price he could get. The clerk blinked, but he jotted the order down on his pad and went out on to the main floor. It was a few minutes before the bell.

"What if it doesn't work?" Sean asked. The tightness in his belly was nauseating. "It must work—it's got to work." Duff was twisting his fingers around the head of his cane. When the bell rang Sean jumped. He heard their clerk's voice—"I sell C.R.C.'s"—and then the confused mumble of voices as the trading started. Through the lounge door he saw the recorder chalk up the first sale. Thirty-seven shillings Sean forced himself to relax. The recorder wiped out the figures and wrote again. Thirty-six shillings.

"It's moving," Sean whispered, and Duff's hand clenched on the arm of the chair. "Thirty-five. . . ." The elusive number at last. Sean heard Duff sigh. "Now the banks will come in. Get ready to get rich, laddie." Thirty-four and six, wrote the recorder.

"They must come in now," said Duff again.

The clerk came into the lounge. "I managed to sell them, sir."

Sean straightened up quickly. "So soon?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, three big sales and I got rid of them all. I'm afraid the last was only at thirty-four and sixpence."

Sean stared at the board. The figure was still thirty-four and sixpence. "Duff, something's wrong. Why haven't the banks come in yet?"

"We'll force them to unload." Duff's voice was unnaturally hoarse. He snarled at the clerk: "Sell another one hundred thousand at thirty shillings." The man's face went slack with surprise, but he turned and scurried out of the lounge.

"Duff!" Sean grabbed his arm. "Have you gone mad? We haven't got another hundred thousand shares!" He jumped up. "I'm going to stop him." He ran to the door and pushed his way through the crowd to his clerk. "Don't sell any more," he whispered.

The man looked surprised. "I've sold them already, sir."

Sean looked at the board. "The whole hundred thousand?"

There was horrified disbelief in his voice.

"Yes, sir. Someone took the lot in one batch."

Sean walked back across the floor in a daze. He sank into the chair beside Duff. "They're sold already," he said incredulously.

"We'll force them to sell," Duff muttered again. Sean turned to him with alarm. Duff was sweating and his eyes were very bright.

"Steady, man," Sean whispered. He knew that they were watched by everybody in the lounge. Where were the banks? Why weren't they selling? It was like a bad dream.

Sean looked across the trading floor; and now he knew it was a bad dream, for Hradsky and Max were there, walking across the floor towards the members' lounge. Men were crowding round them and Hradsky was smiling and holding up his hands as if to fend off their questions. They came into the lounge and Hradsky lowered himself into his chair. He was still smiling; and Sean watched the smile with flesh-crawling fascination. Beside him, Duff was just as stricken.

Max spoke quickly to Hradsky and then walked across to Sean and Duff. "The clerk informs us that you have contracted to sell to Mr. Hradsky three hundred and seventy thousand shares in C.R.C. at an average price of thirty-six shillings." Max's lashes drooped sadly on to his cheeks. "The total issue of C.R.C.'s, as you know, is one million shares, of which Mr. Hradsky has always held six hundred and thirty thousand, and during the last two days he has been able to purchase another seventy-five thousand shares besides yours. This makes his total holdings in C.R.C.'s well over a million shares. It seems therefore that you have sold shares that don't exist."

Duff blurted out, "But the banks—why didn't the banks sell?"

Max smiled a mournful little smile. "The day he reached Port Natal Mr. Hradsky transferred sufficient funds from his accounts there to cover his overdrafts in Johannesburg. He sent you that telegram and returned here immediately."

"But—but you lied to us. You tricked us!"

Max inclined his head. "Mr. Charleywood, I will not discuss honesty with a man who does not understand the meaning of the word." Max went back to Hradsky's side.

Everyone in the lounge had heard him, and while Duff and Sean

went on sitting amid the ruins of their fortune, the struggle to buy C.R.C. shares started on the main floor. In five minutes the price was over ninety shillings and climbing. Sean touched Duff's arm. "Let's go."

As they passed Hradsky's chair he spoke. "Mr. Charleywood, you can't win all the time." It came out quite clearly with only a slight catch on the *c*—it was always a difficult letter for Norman Hradsky.

Duff turned to face Hradsky, his mouth open as he struggled to find a reply. His lips moved, groping for words—but there were none. Sean held his arm, and no one took any notice of the two of them as they went out and Mbejane drove them up to Xanadu.

In the drawing-room Sean poured two tumblers half full of brandy and gave one to Duff. "I'm sorry—I lost my head," Duff said. "I thought we'd be able to buy those shares for dirt when the banks started selling."

"It doesn't matter." Sean's voice was tired. "We were smashed before that happened. God! What a well-laid trap it was."

"It was so damn cunning, we couldn't have guessed, could we, Sean?" Duff was trying to excuse himself.

Sean loosened his collar. "That night up at the mine dump—I would have staked my life Max wasn't lying. How they must have laughed to see us fall into that pit?"

"But we aren't finished, Sean, are we?" Duff was looking for a peg to hang his hope on. "We'll save enough out of the wreckage to start again. We'll build it all up again, won't we, Sean?"

Sean laughed. "Sure. You can get a job down at the Bright Angels cleaning the spittoons and I'll get one playing the piano."

"But—but—there'll be something left. A couple of thousand even. We could sell this house."

"Don't dream, Duff. This house belongs to Hradsky. Everything belongs to him. We owe him close to a hundred thousand shares that don't exist. The only way we can deliver them is to buy them from him first, and he can set his own price. We're finished, Duff. Smashed! Broken! Have another drink on Hradsky, it's his brandy now." He swept his arm round the room. "Tomorrow the sheriff will be here to attach all this; then through the due processes of the law it will be handed to its rightful owner—Mr. Norman Hradsky." Sean started back towards his chair and then stopped. "The due

processes of the law," he repeated softly. "I wonder—it might work."

Duff sat up eagerly. "You've got an idea?"

"Well, half an idea. Listen, Duff, if I can save a couple of thousand out of this, do you agree that we get out of here?"

"Where to? Where will we go?"

"We were facing north when we started. It's as good a direction as any. They say there's gold and ivory beyond the Limpopo. Let's start again. I bet you've forgotten how it feels to sit on a horse and handle a rifle, to have the wind in your face and not a city within five hundred miles."

"But it means leaving everything we've worked for!"

"Sweet merciful heavens, man, are you blind? You don't own anything. How the hell can you leave something you haven't got? I'm going down to try to make a deal with Hradsky. Are you coming?"

Duff's lips were trembling. At last he felt the full impact of their position, and he was dazed. He shook his head.

"All right," said Sean. "Wait for me here."

Hradsky's suite was full of talking, laughing men. Sean recognized most of them as the courtiers who used to cluster round the throne on which he and Duff had sat. When they saw him, the laughter and loud voices fizzled out. Max pulled open the top drawer of the desk and dropped his hand into it, watching Sean. One by one the courtiers picked up their hats and canes and hurried out of the room. Some of them mumbled embarrassed greetings as they brushed past Sean. Then there were only the three of them left—Sean standing quietly in the doorway, Max behind the desk with his hand on the pistol, and Hradsky in the chair by the fire-place, watching through yellow, half-hooded eyes. Max glanced quickly at Hradsky, saw his barely perceptible nod and looked back at Sean. "Come in, please, Mr. Courteney."

Sean pushed the door shut. "You won't need the gun, Max."

"And the score is in our favour, is it not, Mr. Courteney."

Sean nodded. "Yes, you've won. We are prepared to make over to you all the C.R.C. shares we hold."

Max shook his head unhappily. "I'm afraid it's not quite as easy as that. You have undertaken to sell us a certain number of shares. We must insist upon delivery in full."

"So you are going to twist the knife, are you?"

"You put it very poetically, Mr. Courteney."

"Have you considered the consequences of forcing us into bankruptcy? Sequestration orders, creditors' meetings, court actions and counteractions, enforced sale of the shares, and costs to pay. A liquidator with any sense could string it out for three or four years, all the time drawing a handsome commission. Have you thought of that, Max?"

The narrowing of Max's eyes showed that he hadn't. He looked at Hradsky with a trace of helplessness, and Sean took a little comfort from that look. "Now what I suggest is this. You let us draw ten thousand pounds and take our horses and personal belongings. We, in exchange, will give you shares, bank accounts, property, everything. You cannot possibly get more out of it if you force us into bankruptcy."

Hradsky gave Max a message in their private facial code and Max interpreted it to Sean.

"Would you mind waiting outside while we discuss your offer?"

Sean pulled out his watch. "Will twenty minutes be enough?"

"Ample, thank you, Mr. Courteney."

When the twenty minutes was up Sean went back into Hradsky's suite. They were waiting for him.

"Give me the decision, Max." Sean could even grin at him.

"Mr. Hradsky has very generously——"

"How much?" Sean cut him short.

"Mr. Hradsky will allow you to take fifteen hundred and your personal effects. You will agree not to embark on any business venture on the Witwatersrand for a period of three years."

"That will be too soon," said Sean. "Make it two thousand and you've got a deal."

"The offer is not open to discussion."

Sean could see they meant it. "All right, I accept."

SEAN FOUND Duff sound asleep in the chair where he had left him in the drawing-room of Xanadu, the bottle by his side empty. Huddled in the big chair, with the curly hair hanging over his forehead, he seemed to have shrunk. "Bedtime for small boys," said Sean. He lifted him out of the chair and half carried him up the stairs.

At the top he stopped and tried to analyse his own feelings. Damn it—he felt happy! It was ridiculous to feel so happy in the midst of disaster. He got Duff into his room and on to the bed and said, "Sleep well. There's a long ride ahead of us tomorrow."

He stopped again at the top of the marble stairs and looked down at the splendour of the hall below. He was leaving all of it, and yet he laughed aloud now. Perhaps he was happy because by avoiding the worst he had made defeat into victory. A pathetic little victory, but at least they were no worse off now than they had been when they had arrived on the Rand. And—there was also the feeling of release. That was another part of this happiness. To go on north to a new land He felt a tingle of anticipation.

He ran down the stairs and went out into the stable yard. "Mbejane!"

He heard the clatter of an overturned stool, and a door burst open. "Nkosi, what is it?" Sean's urgency had alarmed Mbejane.

"Take the six best horses we have. Make them ready before tomorrow's light. Two with saddles, the others to carry the packs."

Mbejane smiled. "Could it be we are going hunting, Nkosi?"

"It could easily be," Sean agreed.

"How long will we be gone, Nkosi?"

"How long is for ever? Bring your *kaross* and your spears, and we will see where the road leads."

Sean went back to his bedroom. It took him half an hour to pack; what he chose made only half a horseload. He threw his sheepskin coat over a chair with his leather breeches and slouch hat, ready to wear in the morning, and picked out a pair of shot-guns from the study. Then he went to the hotel to say good-bye to Candy.

"Have you heard?" he asked her.

"Yes, everyone knows. Oh, Sean, I'm so sorry—how is Duff?"

"He'll be all right."

"I'll go to him," she said quickly. "He'll need me now."

Sean raised an eyebrow and looked at her until she dropped her eyes. "No, you're right. Perhaps later, when he's got over the shock."

"Candy, this is good-bye. We're going first thing tomorrow."

"No! Sean, you're joking!" But she knew he wasn't.

He kissed her. "Be happy," he ordered her.

"I'll try. Come back one day soon."

"Only if you promise to marry me."

He smiled at her and she caught his beard and tugged his head from side to side. "Get away with you—before I hold you to that." He left then because he knew she would weep and he didn't want to watch.

The next morning Duff packed his gear under Sean's direction, with a dazed obedience. When he had finished, Sean marched him down to where the horses waited in the chill gloom of dawn. With the horses were four shapes in the darkness.

"Mbejane," Sean called. "Who are these with you?"

They came forward and Sean chuckled. "Hlubi, of the noble belly! Nonga! And you, Kandhla?" Men who had worked beside him in the Candy Deep, had plied the spades that had uncovered his fortune, had plied the spears that protected it from the first predators. They crowded forward, smiling as widely and whitely as only Zulus can.

"What brings you rogues together so early in the day?" Sean asked.

Hlubi answered for them. "Nkosi, we heard talk of a trek and our feet burnt; we heard talk of hunting and we could not sleep."

"There is no money for wages." Sean spoke gruffly to cover the sudden rush of affection he felt for them.

"We made no talk of wages," Hlubi answered with dignity.

It was the reply Sean had expected. He cleared his throat. "You would come with me when you know I have the *tagathi* on me?" He used the Zulu word for an evil spirit. "You would follow me knowing that behind me I leave a spoor of dead men and sorrow?"

"Nkosi." Hlubi was grave. "Something always dies when the lion feeds, and yet there is meat for those that follow him."

They rode down the drive of Xanadu and took the Pretoria road. They climbed to the ridge and checked their horses at the crest. Sean and Duff looked back across the valley filled with early morning mist. The mists turned to gold as the low sun touched them, and a mine hooter howled dismally.

Sean sat silently staring at the golden mist. It was beautiful. It hid the scarred earth and it hid the mills; it was a most appropriate cloak for that evil, greedy city. He turned his horse away towards Pretoria and slapped the loose end of his reins across its neck.

Nerve

A Condensation of the book by

DICK FRANCIS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANCIS MARSHALL



"Nerve" is published by Michael Joseph, London

A JOCKEY was dead. He had shot himself in the parade ring before his race. Was this an isolated tragedy, or yet another of the mysterious "accidents" that were plaguing the British racing world and breeding an atmosphere of resentment and distrust between jockeys and trainers?

For Rob Finn, a young jockey, this question takes on a personal urgency when the run of success that is taking him to the top of his profession ends abruptly. People say that he has lost his nerve, but Finn knows better. And with the help of his attractive cousin Joanna, the girl who stands by him, he sets out fearlessly to prove them wrong. In the showdown that follows, it is nerve that counts.

This unusually exciting novel, written by a former Champion Steeplechase Jockey, probes beneath the surface of a sport renowned for its pace and high drama and reveals a story to match.

"Superbly exciting psychological thriller."
—*Daily Express*

"On the evidence of *Nerve*, Dick Francis will become the outstanding racing novelist of our day." —*Evening Standard*



CHAPTER I

ART MATHEWS shot himself, loudly and messily, in the centre of the parade ring at Dunstable races.

He had walked out of the changing-room ahead of me, his head down on his chest as if he were deep in thought. I noticed him stumble slightly down the two steps from the weighing-room to the path; and when someone spoke to him he gave absolutely no sign of having heard. But there was nothing to suggest that when he had stood in the parade ring talking for two or three minutes with the owner and trainer of the horse he was due to ride, he would take off his jerkin, produce from under it a large automatic pistol, place the barrel against his temple and squeeze the trigger. The casualness of his movement was as shocking as its effect.

He fell forward to the ground, his face hitting the grass with an audible thud and his helmet rolling off. The bullet had passed straight through his skull, and the exit wound lay open to the sky.

The crack of the gunshot echoed round the paddock. Heads turned and the busy hum of conversation from the three-deep rail-side race-goers grew hushed and finally silent as they took in the appalling sight.

Mr. John Brewar, the owner of Art's prospective mount, stood with his mouth open, his eyes glazed with surprise. And Corin Kellar, the trainer for whom both Art and I had been about to ride, went down on one knee beside Art.

The stewards hurried over and stood staring in horror. It was part of their responsibility at a meeting to stand in the parade ring while the horses were led round before each race, so that they would be both witnesses and adjudicators if anything irregular should occur. Nothing as irregular as a public suicide of a top-notch steeplechase jockey had ever, I imagined, required their attention before.

The elder of them, Lord Tirrold, a tall, thin man, bent over Art. I saw the muscles bunch along his jaw, and he looked up at me across Art's body and said quietly, "Finn . . . fetch a rug."

I walked a little way down the parade ring. The trainer of one of the horses due to run in the race took the rug off his horse and held it out to me. I thanked him and went back with it.

The other steward, a sour-tempered hulk named Ballerton, was, I was meanly pleased to see, losing his cherished dignity by vomiting up his lunch.

Lord Tirrold helped me open the rug and we spread it gently over the dead man. Lord Tirrold then went over and spoke to one or two of the little silent groups of people who had runners in the race; presently the stable lads led all the horses out from the parade ring and back to the saddling boxes.

I stood looking down at Corin Kellar and his distress, which I thought he thoroughly deserved. I wondered how it felt to know one had driven a man to kill himself.

There was a click, and a voice announced over the loud-speaker that owing to a serious accident in the parade ring the last two races would be abandoned. I picked up Art's helmet and whip from the grass.

Poor Art. Poor badgered, beleaguered Art, rubbing out his misery with a scrap of lead.

I turned away and walked thoughtfully back to the weighing-room.

While we changed back from riding kit into our normal clothes the atmosphere down our end of the changing-room was one of irreverence covering shock. Art, occupying by general consent the position of elder statesmen among jockeys, had been much deferred to and respected. His one noticeable weakness was his conviction that a lost race was always due to some deficiency in his horse or its training, and never to a mistake on his own part. We all knew perfectly well that Art was no exception to the rule that every jockey misjudges things once in a while.

"Thank the Lord," said Tick-Tock Ingersoll, stripping off his blue-and-black-checked jersey, "that Art was considerate enough to let us all weigh out before bumping himself off. If he'd done it an hour ago we'd all have been ten quid out of pocket."

He was right. Our fees for each race were technically earned once we had sat on the scales and been checked out, and they would be automatically paid whether we ran the race or not.

"In that case," said Peter Cloony, "we should put half of it into a fund for his widow." He was a quiet young man prone to over-emotional bouts of pity both for others and for himself.

"Not ruddy likely," said Tick-Tock. "Ten quid's ten quid to me, and Mrs. Art's rolling in it."

I sympathized with Tick-Tock. I needed the money, too. Besides, Mrs. Art had treated all of us rank-and-file jockeys icily. Giving her a fiver in Art's memory wouldn't thaw her.

"Let's just buy Art a wreath," I said, "and perhaps a useful memorial, like some hot showers in the washroom here."

Peter Cloony bent on me a look of sorrowful reproof. But from Tick-Tock and the others came nods of agreement.

Grant Oldfield, a dark, thickset man of thirty, said violently, "Besides that woman probably drove him to it."

There was a curious little silence. A year ago, I reflected, Grant Oldfield would have said the same thing amusingly, not with this unsmiling venom. Lately he could scarcely make the most commonplace remark without giving vent to some inner rage. It was caused, we thought, by the fact that he was going down the ladder again without ever having got to the top. At the vital point in his career when he had had a string of successes and had begun to ride regularly for James Axminster, one



of the very top trainers, something had happened to spoil it. He had lost the Axminster job; other trainers booked him less and less, and his thunderous moods and vile temper increased.

A race-course official threaded his way down the changing-room, spotted me, and shouted, "Finn, the stewards want you."

I finished dressing quickly, walked through the weighing-room, and knocked on the stewards' door.



Both stewards were there with the clerk of the course and Corin Kellar. Lord Tirrold said, "Come along in and close the door."

I did as he said and he went on: "Did you actually see Mathews take the pistol out and aim it, or did you look at him when you heard the shot?"

"I saw him take out the pistol and aim it, sir," I said.

"In that case the police may wish to take a statement; please do not leave the weighing-room building until they have seen you." When I had my hand on the door-knob he said, "Finn, do you know of any reason why Mathews should have wished to end his life?"

I turned and looked at Corin Kellar, who was busy studying his fingernails. "Mr. Kellar might know," I said non-committally.

The stewards exchanged glances. Mr. Ballerton said, "You're not asking us to believe that Mathews killed himself merely because Kellar was dissatisfied with his riding?" He turned to Lord Tirrold. "Really," he added forcefully, "to suggest that Mathews killed himself because of a few hard words is irresponsible mischief."

Lord Tirrold regarded me with speculation. "That will be all, Finn," he said.

I went out, but before I had crossed the weighing-room the door opened again and I heard Corin call me. I turned round and waited for him. "Thanks very much for tossing that little bomb into my lap," he said sarcastically.

His thin face was deeply lined with worry. He was an exceptionally clever trainer but a nervous, undependable man, who offered you life-long friendship one day and cut you dead the next.

He said, "Surely you and the other jockeys don't believe Art killed himself because . . . er . . . I had decided to employ him less? He must have had another reason."

"Today was supposed to be his last as your jockey in any case, wasn't it?" I said. "If you want my opinion, he killed himself because you gave him the sack, and he did it in front of you to cause you the maximum amount of remorse."

"He must have been mad," he said, with a tinge of exasperation. "He'd have had to retire some time. He was getting too old. . . ."

I left him standing there, trying to convince himself that he was in no way responsible for Art's death.

Back in the changing-room most of the jockeys had gone home. Tick-Tock, whistling the latest hit tune between his teeth, sat on a bench and pulled on a pair of very fancy yellow socks. On top of those went smooth, slim-toed ankle boots. He shook down the slender leg of his trousers, and grinned at me across the room. "*Tailor and Cutter's* dream boy."

"My father," I said blandly, "was a Twelve Best Dressed man."

"My grandfather had vicuña linings in his raincoats."

"My mother," I said, dredging for it, "has a Pucci shirt."

"Mine," he said carefully, "cooks in hers."

He waved at me, adjusted his Tyrolean trilby, said, "See you tomorrow," and was gone.

Surely, I thought, nothing could be really wrong in the racing world while young Ingersoll ticked so gaily.

But all the same there *was* something wrong. Very wrong. I didn't know what; I could see only the symptoms, and see them all the more clearly, perhaps, since I had been only two years in the game. Between trainers and jockeys there seemed to be an edginess, an undercurrent of resentment and distrust. There was more to it, I thought, than the usual jungle beneath the surface of any fiercely competitive business.

I drank a cup of sugarless tea and eyed the pieces of fruit cake. As usual it took a good deal of resolution not to eat one. Being constantly hungry was the one thing I did not enjoy about race riding. It was the end of September—always a bad time of the year, with the remains of the summer's fat to be starved off. I sighed, and tried to console myself

that in another month my appetite would have shrunk back to its winter level.

Young Mike, one of the valets, shouted down the room from the doorway, "Rob, there's a copper here to see you."

I went out into the weighing-room. A middle-aged policeman in a peaked cap was waiting for me with a notebook in his hand.

"Robert Finn?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"I understand from Lord Tirrold that you saw Arthur Mathews put the pistol against his temple and pull the trigger?"

"Yes," I agreed.

He made a note; then he said, "It's a straightforward case of suicide. I don't think we will need to trouble you any further. The only thing for the coroner to decide is the wording of his verdict."

"Unsound mind and so on?" I said.

"Yes," he said. "Thank you for waiting. Good afternoon."

I collected my hat and binoculars and walked down to the race-course station.

CHAPTER II

THE LARGE, top-floor flat in Kensington was empty. As usual, it looked as if it had been hit by a minor tornado. Running a practised eye over the chaos I diagnosed the recent presence of my parents, two uncles and a cousin. In the sitting-room my mother's grand piano lay inches deep in piano scores; a violin was propped up in an arm-chair; a cello and a music stand rested side by side along the length of the sofa. An oboe and two clarinets lay on a table, and music stands leaned at drunken angles against the wall.

The talents with which both my parents' families had been lavishly endowed had not descended to me. By the time I was five they had reluctantly faced the fact that their child was unmusical. I had thereafter been shuffled off from London between school terms to a succession of long holidays on farms, to free my parents for their complicated and lengthy concert tours.

They disapproved of my venture into jockeyship for no other reason

than that racing had nothing to do with music. It was no use my pointing out that the one thing I had learned on the various holiday farms was how to ride, and that my present occupation was directly due to their actions in the past.

Thankful to have come in during an intermission, I opened a letter I found waiting for me. I was smiling complacently, which just shows how often life can get up and slap you when you least expect it. In a familiar childish hand the letter said:

> Dearest Rob,
>
> I am afraid this may come as a surprise to you, but I am getting married. He is Sir Morton Henge, and he is very sweet and kind and no cracks from you about him being old enough to be my father etc. I don't think I had better ask you to the reception, do you? Morton doesn't know about us, and you will be a great dear not to let on. I shall never forget you, dearest Rob. Thank you for everything, and good-bye.
>
> Your loving Paulina

Sir Morton Henge, middle-aged widower and canning tycoon. Well, well. In the eighteen months since I had first met Paulina she had progressed from mousy-haired obscurity to blonde blossoming on the cover of at least one glossy magazine a week. I had known that it was inevitable that one day she would forsake me if she struck gold, but all of a sudden a future without her seemed bleak.

I went through to my little bedroom and changed into jeans and an old checked shirt. My stomach gave an extra twist, which was the effect of not having eaten for twenty-three hours. I made for the kitchen. Before I reached it, however, the front door of the flat banged open and in trooped my parents, uncles and cousin.

"Hello, darling," said my mother, presenting a smooth sweet-smelling cheek for a kiss. It was her usual greeting to everyone.

My father, an oboist of international reputation who treated me with polite friendliness, asked as always, "Did you have a good day?" I usually answered briefly yes or no, knowing that he was not really interested.

I said, "I saw a man kill himself. No, it wasn't a good day."

Five heads turned. My mother said, "Darling! *What?*"

"A jockey shot himself at the races. He was only six feet away from me. It was a mess." All five of them stood there looking at me. But

they were unaffected. The cello uncle shrugged, and went on into the sitting-room, saying over his shoulder, "Well, if you will go in for these peculiar pursuits" The others drifted after him.

I listened to them retuning. The flat was suddenly intolerable. I went out and began to walk. There was only one place to go if I wanted a certain kind of peace, and I didn't care to go there too often for fear of wearing out my welcome. But it was a full month since I had seen my cousin Joanna, and I needed her company.

She was a singer, well on her way to amassing a fair-sized reputation on the concert stage, but when she opened the door with her usual air of good-humoured invitation she greeted me in a pair of jeans as old as my own and a black sweater streaked with paint.

"I'm trying my hand at oils," she said, gesturing at an easel on which stood a half-finished portrait. "It's not going very well, damn it." She made a tentative dab at the picture, then, without looking at me, she said, "What's the matter?"

I didn't answer. She said, "There's some steak in the kitchen."

A mind reader, my cousin Joanna. I found a thick steak and grilled it with a couple of tomatoes and made some French dressing for a lettuce I found already prepared in a wooden bowl. The steak smelt wonderful. Joanna and I ate every scrap. I finished first, and sat back and watched her. She had a fascinating face, full of strength and character, with straight dark eyebrows and her short black hair tucked in a no-nonsense style behind her ears.

My cousin Joanna was the reason I was still a bachelor at twenty-six. I had been in love with her from the cradle and had several times asked her to marry me, but she had always said first cousins were too closely related; besides which, I didn't stir her blood.

She pushed away her empty plate and said, "Now, what's the matter?"

I told her about Art and when I had finished she said, "The poor man. Why did he do it, do you know?"

"I think it was because Art was such a perfectionist he simply couldn't face everyone's knowing he'd been given the sack. But the odd thing is that he looked as good as ever to me. He and Corin Kellar, the trainer who retained him, were always having rows when their horses

didn't win, but someone else would have employed him, even if not one of the top stables like Corin's."

"And there you have it, I should think," she said. "Death was preferable to decline. I hope that when your time comes to retire you will do it less drastically." I smiled, and she added, "And just what will you do when you retire?"

"Retire? I have only just started," I said.

"And in fourteen years time you'll be a second-rate, battered forty with nothing to live on but horsy memories."

"And you," I said, "will be a middle-aged contralto's understudy, with your vocal cords growing less flexible every year."

She laughed. "How gloomy. But I see your point. From now on I'll try not to disapprove of your job because it lacks a future."

"But you'll go on disapproving for other reasons?'

"Certainly. It's basically frivolous, unproductive, escapist, and it encourages people to waste time and money on unessentials."

"Like music," I said.

She glared at me. "For that you shall do the washing up."

I did penance for my heresy and then I brought in a peace offering of some freshly made coffee. "Do you mind if I turn the television on?" I asked. "It's a racing programme."

"Oh, very well. If you must." But she smiled.

I switched it on, and we saw a batch of advertisements and then a series of speeded-up superimposed views of horses racing, announcing the weekly fifteen minutes of "Turf Talk."

The well-known face of Maurice Kemp-Lore came on the screen, smiling and casual. He began in his easy charming way to introduce his guest of the evening, a prominent bookmaker, and his topic of the evening, the mathematics involved in making a book.

"But first," he said, "I would like to pay tribute to the steeplechase jockey, Art Mathews, who died today by his own hand at Dunstable races. Although never actually a champion jockey, Art was acknowledged to be one of the six best steeplechase riders in the country, a splendid example to young jockeys. . . ."

He finished off Art's glowing obituary neatly and reintroduced the bookmaker, who gave a clear and fascinating demonstration of

how to come out on the winning side. It was well up to the high standard of all the Kemp-Lore programmes.

After his "See you all next week at the same time," I switched off the set and Joanna said, "Do you watch that every week?"

"It's a racing must," I said. "Full of things one ought not to miss, and quite often his guest is someone I've met."

"Mr. Kemp-Lore knows his onions, then?"

"He was brought up to it. His father rode a Grand National winner back in the thirties and is now a big noise on the National Hunt Committee; which," I went on, seeing her blank look, "is the ruling body of steeplechasing."

"Has Mr. Kemp-Lore ridden any Grand National winners himself?"

"No," I said. "I don't think he rides much at all. Horses give him asthma, or something like that."

Joanna's interest in



racing, never very strong, subsided entirely at this point, and for an hour or so we talked amicably and aimlessly about how the world wagged. Finally, I said good night. Joanna came with me to the door. "Come again," she said, and as an afterthought, "How is Paulina?"

"She is going to marry," I said, "Sir Morton Henge."

I am not sure what I expected in the way of sympathy, but I should have known. Joanna laughed.

CHAPTER III

TWO WEEKS after Art died I stayed a night at Peter Cloony's. It was the first Cheltenham meeting of the season, and I went down as usual on the race train, carrying some overnight things in a small suitcase. I had one race on each day and intended to spend the night at a pub. But Peter kindly offered me a bed and I accepted.

My ride the first day was a novice hurdler called Neddikins. His past form was a sorry record of falls and unfinished races. He had no chance of winning, but I managed to wake him up slightly, so that although we finished last, we finished. A triumph, I considered it, to have got round at all, and to my surprise this was also the opinion of his trainer. Neddikins was the first horse I rode for James Axminster, and I knew I had been asked because he had not wanted to risk injury to his usual jockey. Many such rides came my way, but I counted them good experience.

At the end of the afternoon Peter drove me to the small village in the Cotswolds where he lived. About twenty miles from Cheltenham, we turned off the main road into a narrow secondary road bordered on each side by thick hedges that led to the village. Peter's house was modern, brick-built, with neatly edged flower beds. His wife opened the door. She was, I saw, very soon to have a child. "Do come in," she said shyly, shaking my hand.

The bungalow was sparsely furnished, but neat and clean and smelt of furniture polish. In the sitting-room there were only a sofa, a television set, and a dining table with four chairs.

Peter and his wife were clearly devoted to each other; it showed in every glance, every word, every touch.

"How long have you two been married?" I asked.

Peter said, "Nine months," and his wife blushed beguilingly.

After we had had dinner, we washed the dishes and spent the evening watching television and talking about racing.

I slept well. In the morning, after breakfast, Peter did some household jobs and insisted on fetching a loaf of bread from the village to save his wife the walk. As a result we started out for the Cheltenham race-course later than we had intended. We streaked along the narrow roads and were about to turn into the main road when we first saw the army tank carrier. It was slewed across the road diagonally, completely blocking the way.

Peter's urgent tooting produced one soldier, who ambled over, said they'd been lost, tried to turn round, got stuck, and now his mate was telephoning H.Q. for instructions.

We both got out of the car to have a look. The great unwieldy tank carrier was solidly jammed across the lane.

Pale and grim, Peter climbed back into his seat with me beside him. He had to back up for a quarter of a mile before we came to a gateway he could turn the car in; then we back-tracked through the village and out on to a road on the far side. We had to make a long detour to get back to the right direction, and altogether the tank carrier put at least twelve miles on to our journey.

Several times Peter said despairingly, "I'll be late." He was due to ride in the first race, and the trainer for whom he rode liked him to report to him an hour early. Trainers had to state jockeys' names at least three quarters of an hour before the event. Peter rode for a man who found a substitute if his jockey was not there an hour before the race.

We reached the race-course just forty-three minutes before the first race. Peter sprinted towards the weighing-room but as I followed him I heard the loudspeaker announce the runners and riders of the first race. P. Cloony was not among them.

I found him in the changing-room, sitting on the bench with his head in his hands. "He didn't wait," he said miserably. "He's put Ingersoll up instead." Tick-Tock caught my eye and grimaced in sympathy. But it was not his fault he had been given the ride.

The worst of it was that Tick-Tock won. I was standing beside Peter when his replacement skated by the winning post, and he made a choking sound as if he were about to burst into tears.

"Never mind," I said awkwardly. "It's not the end of the world."

But all that day Peter couldn't stop boring everyone in the weighing-room by harping on the tank carrier over and over again.

For myself, things went slightly better. The young hurdler I was to ride for James Axminster had as vile a reputation as his stablemate the previous day. But for some reason the wayward animal and I got on very well together from the start, and to my surprise we came over the last hurdle in second place and passed the leading horse on the stretch to the winning post. The odds-on favourite finished fourth. It was my second win of the season, and it was greeted with dead silence.

I found myself trying to explain it away to James Axminster in the winner's unsaddling enclosure. I knew he hadn't had a penny on it. "I'm very sorry, sir," I said. "I couldn't help it."

He looked at me broodingly without answering, and I thought that there was one trainer who would not employ me again in a hurry. Sometimes it is as bad to win unexpectedly as to lose on a certainty. I stood waiting for the storm to break.

"Well, go along and weigh in," he said abruptly. "And when you're dressed I want to talk to you."

When I came out of the changing-room he was talking to Lord Tirrold, whose horses he trained. They turned towards me. "What stable do you ride for most?" James Axminster asked.

I said, "I ride mainly for farmers who train their own horses. I haven't a steady job with a public trainer."

"You know you have made me look a proper fool," Axminster said. "I've told the owner often that his horse is pretty useless."

"I'm sorry, sir," I said again. And I meant it.

"Don't look so glum about it. I'll give you another chance. There's a slow old plug you can ride for me on Saturday—Geranium, in the handicap chase at Hereford—if you're not booked already, and two or three others next week. After that . . . we'll see."

"Thank you," I said dazedly. "Thank you very much." It was as if he had handed me a gold brick when I had expected a scorpion. If I

acquitted myself at all well on his horses, he might use me regularly as a second-string jockey. That would be a giant step up.

"Can you do the weight? Ten stone?"

"Yes," I said. I'd need to lose another three pounds in the two days, but starvation had never seemed so attractive.

"Very well. I'll see you there." I watched him and Lord Tirrold go out of the weighing-room together. Between them they had won almost every important event in the National Hunt calendar.

James Axminster was a big man in every sense. Six foot four and solidly bulky, he moved and spoke and made decisions with easy assurance. His training stable was one of the six largest in the country. To have been offered a toe-hold in this set-up was almost as frightening as it was miraculous.

I spent most of the next day running round Hyde Park in three sweaters and a windcheater. At about six o'clock I boiled three eggs and ate them without salt or bread. After that I went to the Turkish baths in Jermyn Street and spent the whole night there. In the morning I went back to the flat and ate three more boiled eggs, and at last made my way to Hereford.

The needle quivered when I sat on the scales with the lightest possible saddle and boots. It pendulumed above and below the ten-stone mark, finally settling a hairbreadth on the right side.

"Ten stone," said the clerk of the scales in a surprised voice.

In the parade ring James Axminster beckoned the lad who was leading round the slow old plug I was to ride and said, "You'll have to kick this old mare along a bit. She's lazy. A good jumper, but that's about all."

I was used to kicking lazy horses. I kicked, and the mare jumped; and we finished third.

"H'm," said Axminster as I unbuckled the girths. When I had changed into the colours of the other horse I had been engaged to ride that afternoon, Axminster was waiting for me at the changing-room door. He handed me a paper. It was a list of four horses running the following week. "Well?" he said. "Can you ride them?"

I said, "Thank you, sir. I'd be glad to." He turned away, and I folded up the precious list and put it in my pocket.

Tick-Tock and I went out together to the parade ring. We were both riding that afternoon for Corin Kellar.

"Paste on a toothy leer," Tick-Tock said. "The eye of the world has swivelled our way."

I glanced up to a platform where a television camera swung towards us as it followed the progress of a grey horse round the ring.

"The great man himself is here somewhere too," said Tick-Tock, "the one and only Mr. Kemp-Lore no less."

We joined Corin and he gave us our instructions. Tick-Tock's mount was a good one, but I was as usual riding a horse of whom little was expected, and quite rightly, as it turned out. We trailed in a long way behind, and I saw from the numbers going up in the frame that Corin's other horse had won.

Corin and Tick-Tock and the horse's owner were in the winner's enclosure when I walked back to the weighing-room, but Corin caught me by the arm as I went past and asked me to come straight out again, to tell him how the horse had run. When I rejoined him he was talking to a man whom I recognized as Maurice Kemp-Lore. Corin introduced us.

It never ceases to be disconcerting, meeting for the first time in the flesh a man whose face is as familiar to you as a brother's. Kemp-Lore was, I judged, in his early thirties. Of average height and slim build, with firm, sun-tanned features and light hair. His charm was instantly compelling. The effect was calculated, his stock-in-trade. All good interviewers know how to give people confidence and Kemp-Lore was a master of his art.

"I see you were last in that race," he said. "Bad luck."

"Bad horse," said Corin.

"I've been wanting to do a programme on—if you'll forgive me—an unsuccessful jockey." His warm smile took the sting out of his words. "Perhaps it would be fairer to say a jockey who is not yet successful." His blue eyes twinkled. "Would you consider telling my viewers what sort of life you lead—your financial position, reliance on chance rides . . . that sort of thing? Just to give the public the reverse side of the coin. They know all about jockeys who win important races." He smiled. "Will you do it?"

"Yes," I said, "certainly. But I'm not really typical. I"

He interrupted me. "Don't tell me anything now," he said. "I always prefer not to know the answers to my specific questions until we are actually on the air. It makes the whole thing more spontaneous. I will send you a list of the sort of questions I will be asking, and you can think out your replies. O.K.?"

"Yes," I said. "All right."

"Good. Next Friday then. The programme goes on at nine o'clock. Get to the studios by seven thirty, will you? That gives time for seeing to lighting, make-up, and so on, and perhaps for a drink beforehand. Oh, and by the way, there will be a fee, of course, and your expenses." He smiled sympathetically.

"Thank you." I smiled back. "I'll be there."

He strolled away and Corin said in a smug, self-satisfied voice, "I know Maurice quite well. A grand fellow. Good family. His father won the National and his sister is the best lady point-to-point rider there has been for years. Poor old Maurice, though, he hardly rides at all. Horses give him the most ghastly asthma, you know."

Back in the changing-room I was annoyed to see Grant Oldfield standing by my peg, holding the list of horses James Axminster had given me. Grant had been going through my pockets.

My protest was never uttered. Without a word, without warning, Grant swung his fist and punched me heavily in the nose.

Blood splashed in a scarlet stain down the front of my silk shirt and made big uneven blotches on the white breeches.

"For heaven's sake, lay him down on his back," said one of the valets, hurrying over. I was already lying propped up by the leg of the bench. Young Mike, my valet, thrust a saddle under my shoulders and pushed my head backward over it. A second later he was piling a cold, wet towel across the bridge of my nose; and gradually the bleeding lessened and stopped.

Grant scowled down at me, then turned without saying a word and pushed his way out of the changing-room as the jockeys returned from the last race. The list of Axminster horses fluttered to the floor in his wake. Tick-Tock dumped his saddle on the bench. "What have we here? A blood bath?" he said.

"Grant socked him," said one of the jockeys who had been there.

"Why?"

"Ask me another," I said. "Or ask Grant." I lifted the towel off my face and stood up gingerly.

I cleaned myself up and changed, and walked down to the station with Tick-Tock. "You must know why he hit you," he said.

I handed him Axminster's list. He read it and gave it back. "Yes, I see. Hatred and jealousy. You're stepping into the shoes he couldn't fill himself. He had his chance there, and he muffed it."

"What happened?" I asked. "Why did Axminster drop him?"

"I don't honestly know," Tick-Tock said. "You'd better ask Grant and find out what mistakes not to make."

THE FLAT was empty. I made myself an ice bag and lay down on the bed with it balanced on my forehead. I shut my eyes and thought about Grant and Art; two disintegrated people. One had been driven to violence against himself, and the other had turned violent against the world. Poor things, I thought rather too complacently, they were not stable enough to deal with whatever had undermined them; and I remembered that easy pity later on.

On the following Wednesday Peter Cloony came to the races bubbling over with happiness. The baby was a boy, his wife was fine, everything was rosy. The horse he rode that afternoon started favourite and ran badly, but it didn't damp his spirits.

The next day he was due to ride in the first race, and he was twenty minutes late. I heard fragments of his trainer's angry remarks "Second time in a week . . . irresponsible . . . I've had to get another jockey. . . ."

When I went into the changing-room a short time later he was sitting on a bench, white and trembling. "What happened this time?" I asked.

He stood up. "You'll never believe it but there was something else stuck across the lane, and I had to go miles round again." His voice trailed off as I looked at him in disbelief.

"Not another tank carrier?" I asked incredulously.

"No, a car. One of those decrepit old Jaguars. It had its nose in the hedge and it was jammed tight, right across the lane. The doors were locked, and the hand brake was full on."

"It's very bad luck," I said inadequately.

"Bad luck!" he repeated explosively. "It's more than bad luck, it's —it's awful. I can't afford . . . I need the money. . . ."

Peter had not been booked for any other ride that afternoon; he spent the day mooching about the weighing-room so as to be under the eye of any trainers looking hurriedly for a jockey. He wore a desperate, hunted look, and I knew that that alone would have discouraged me had I been a trainer. He left, unemployed and disconsolate, just before the fifth race. As I watched him go I felt a surge of irritation. Why didn't he leave himself a margin for error on his journeys? And what a dismal coincidence, I reflected, that the lane should have been blocked twice in a week.

In the parade ring James Axminster introduced me to the owner of the horse I was to ride and we made the usual desultory pre-race conversation. In the two earlier races that week I had been riding the stable's second string while Pip Pankhurst, Axminster's top jockey, took his usual place on the better horses. Thursday's handicap hurdle, however, was all my own because Pip could not do the weight.

"Anything under ten stone six, and it's yours," he told me cheerfully, when he found I was riding some of his stable's horses.

By eating and drinking very little I had managed to keep my riding weight down to ten stone for a whole week. This meant a body weight of nine stone eight, which was a strain, but with Pip in such an ungrudging frame of mind it was well worth it.

Axminster gestured towards the middle-aged handicap hurdler plodding sleepily round the ring. "At the fourth hurdle, you want to be somewhere in the middle. About three from home, you want to lie about fourth. Start him moving going into the second last. Try to come up to the leader at the last. He's a great jumper, but has no finishing speed. See what you can do, anyway."

He had not given me such detailed instructions before. I felt a quiver of excitement. At last I was about to ride a horse whose trainer would not be thoroughly surprised if he won.

I followed my instructions to the letter, and coming into the last hurdle level with two other horses I kicked my old mount hard. He responded with a zipping leap which sped him clean past the other

horses in mid-air and landed us a good two lengths clear of them. It was true that the old hurdler could not quicken, but he held on gamely, and still had half a length in hand when we passed the post. It was a gorgeous moment.

"Well done," said Axminster matter-of-factly. Winners were nothing out of the ordinary to him. But the owner was delighted. "Well done, well done," he said to the horse, Axminster and me indiscriminately.

Axminster's piercing blue eyes were regarding me quizzically. "Do you want the job?" he asked. "Second to Pip, regular?"

I nodded and dragged in a deep breath, and croaked, "Yes."

The owner laughed. "It's Finn's lucky week. Ballerton tells me Maurice is interviewing him tomorrow evening."

"Really?" Axminster said. "I'll try and watch it."

I TELEPHONED to Joanna. "How about having dinner with me? I want to celebrate."

"What?" she asked economically.

"A winner. A new job. All's right with the world," I said.

"All right. Where?"

"Hennibert's," I said. It was a restaurant in St. James's Street with a standard of cooking to match its address, and prices to match both.

"I'm sold," she said. "I'll be there at eight."

She wore a dress I had not seen before, a slender affair made of a deep-blue shimmering material. Her dark hair curved neatly down on to the nape of her neck, and the tapering lines she had drawn on her eyelids made her black eyes look bigger and deep-set and mysterious. Every male head turned to look at her as we walked down the room.

We ate avocados with French dressing and *boeuf stroganoff* with spinach, and late-crop strawberries and cream. For me, after so many bird-sized meals, it was a feast. We took a long time eating and drank a bottle of wine, and sat over our coffee talking with the ease of a friendship which stretched back to childhood.

Joanna seemed genuinely pleased about the James Axminster job. Even though racing didn't interest her, she saw what it meant to me. My first elation had settled down to a warm cosy glow of satisfaction. I told her about the television programme.

"Tomorrow?" she said. "Good. I'll watch you. You don't do things by halves, do you?"

"This is just the start." I grinned. I almost believed it.

We walked back to Joanna's studio. It was a clear crisp night with the stars blazing coldly in the black sky. We stopped in the dark mews outside Joanna's door. I looked at her. It was a mistake. Her uptilted face with starlight reflected in the shadowy eyes swept me into the turmoil I had been suppressing all evening. "Thank you for coming," I said abruptly. "Good night, Joanna."

She put her hand for a moment on my shoulder in a friendly fashion. "A lovely dinner, Rob," she said, and smiled good night. When she had shut her door, I turned and started back down the mews. I swore violently, aloud. It wasn't much relief.

CHAPTER IV

On my arrival at the Universal Telecast Studios I asked the girl at the reception desk where I should go. She smiled kindly. Would I sit down, she said. She spoke into the telephone: "Mr. Finn is here."

Within ten seconds a young man with freckles and a rising-young-executive, navy-blue pinstriped suit appeared. "Mr. Finn?" he said expansively, holding out a hand. "Glad to have you here. I am Gordon Kildare, associate producer. Maurice is up in the studio running over last-minute details, so I suggest we go along and have a drink and a sandwich first."

He led the way to a small room where, on a table, stood bottles and glasses and four plates of appetizing-looking sandwiches. "What will you have?" he asked hospitably.

"Nothing, thank you," I said.

"Perhaps afterwards, then?" He poured himself a drink and raised it to me smiling. "Good luck," he said. "The great thing is to be natural." He picked up a sandwich and took a squelchy bite.

In a few minutes Maurice Kemp-Lore strode briskly in.

"My dear chap," he greeted me, shaking me warmly by the hand. "Has Gordon been looking after you? You got the list of questions all right and thought out some answers?"



"Yes," I said.

"Good, good. That's fine," he said.

The telephone rang. Gordon answered it, listened briefly and said, "He's here, Maurice."

Kemp-Lore went out, followed by his assistants. His voice could soon be heard coming back along the corridor talking with someone who spoke with a nasal twang. I wondered who the other guest would be. At the doorway Kemp-Lore stood respectfully back to let his guest precede him. My spirits sank. Paunch and horn-rims well to the fore, Mr. John Ballerton was ushered in.

"You know Rob Finn, of course," Kemp-Lore said.

Ballerton nodded coldly in my direction and Kemp-Lore said, "It's time we went up to the studio, I think."

The studio held a tangle of cameras trailing their thick cables over

the floor. To one side there was a carpet-covered platform on which stood three low-slung chairs and a coffee table. Three coffee cups on a tray shared the table with three empty balloon brandy glasses, a silver cigarette box and two large glass ashtrays. "We want to look as informal as possible," Kemp-Lore said pleasantly. "As if we were talking over coffee and brandy after dinner."

He took his place between us. Set in front and slightly to one side stood a monitor set. A battery of cameras faced us.

Gordon and his assistants started checking their lights, and testing for sound. Kemp-Lore said, "I'll just run through the order of the programme. I am going to talk to you first, John, along the lines we discussed. After that, Rob will tell us what his sort of life entails. We're using some film of a race you rode in, Rob. Now, the great thing is to talk naturally. I've explained that too much rehearsal spoils the spontaneity of a programme like this, but it means that a lot of the success of the next quarter of an hour depends on you. I'm sure you will both do splendidly." He finished his pep talk with a cheerful grin.

One of the assistants poured hot black coffee into the three cups. Then he uncorked a bottle of brandy and wet the bottom of the balloon glasses.

"Two minutes," shouted a voice. The spotlights flashed on, dazzling us and blacking out everything in the studio. The monitor set showed an animated cartoon advertising petrol.

"Thirty seconds. Quiet, please," said Gordon.

A hush fell over the studio. Everyone waited. Kemp-Lore beside me arranged his features in the well-known smile, looking straight ahead at the round black lens of the camera.

On the monitor set the superimposed horses galloped and faded. Gordon's hand swept down briskly. The camera in front of Kemp-Lore developed a shining red eye and he began to speak, pleasantly, intimately, straight into a million sitting-rooms.

"Good evening . . . tonight I am going to introduce you to two people who are both deeply involved with National Hunt racing, but who look at it, so to speak, from opposite poles. First, here is Mr. John Ballerton." He gave him a fulsome build-up, and skilfully guided by Kemp-Lore, Ballerton talked about his duties as one of the stewards at

a race meeting. It involved, he said, hearing both sides if there was an objection to a winner, and summoning jockeys and trainers for minor infringements of the rules.

I watched him on the monitor set. I had to admit he looked a solid, sober, responsible citizen with right on his side. No one watching the performance Kemp-Lore coaxed out of him would suspect him to be the bigoted, pompous bully we knew on the race-course.

Before I expected it, Kemp-Lore was turning round to me. I swallowed convulsively. He smiled at the camera and said, with the air of one producing a treat, "Now here is Rob Finn, a young steeplechase jockey just scratching the surface of his career. Few of you will have heard of him. He has won no big races, nor ridden any well-known horses, and I have invited him here tonight to give us all a glimpse of what it is like to try to break into a highly competitive sport. . . ."

The red light was burning on the camera pointing at me. I smiled at it faintly. My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth.

"First," he went on, "here is a piece of film which shows Finn in action. He is the rider with the white cap, fourth from last."

We watched on the monitor set. It was one of the first races I ever rode in, and my inexperience showed sorely. During the few seconds the film lasted the white cap lost two places.

The film faded out and Kemp-Lore said, smiling, "How did you set about starting to be a jockey, once you had decided on it?"

I said, "I knew three farmers who owned and trained their own horses, and I asked them to let me try my hand in a race."

"Usually," Kemp-Lore said, "jumping jockeys either start as amateur steeplechase riders or as apprentices on the flat, but I understand that you did neither of these things, Rob?"

"No," I said. "I started too old to be an apprentice and I couldn't be an amateur because I had earned my living riding horses."

"As a stable lad?" He clearly expected me to say yes. It was, after all, by far the commonest background of jockeys.

"No," I said.

He raised his eyebrows a fraction.

I said, "I was away from England for some years, wandering round the world, mainly in Australia and South America. I got jobs as a

stockman, and spent a year in New South Wales working in a travelling rodeo. Ten seconds on the bucking bronc: that sort of thing."

"Oh." The eyebrows rose another fraction, and there was a perceptible pause before he said, "How very interesting. I wish we had more time to hear about your experiences, but I want to show viewers how a jockey in your position makes a living . . . on a race or two a week. Now, your fee is ten guineas a time"

He took me at some length through my finances, which didn't sound too good when dissected into travelling expenses, valets' fees, replacement of kit and so on. He then turned deferentially to Ballerton. "John, have you any comment to make on what we have been hearing from Rob?"

A trace of malicious pleasure crept into Ballerton's smile. "All these young jockeys complain too much," he stated harshly, ignoring the fact that I had not complained at all. "If they aren't very good at their job they shouldn't expect to be highly paid."

"Eh . . . of course," said Kemp-Lore. "But surely every jockey has to make a start? And there must always be some jockeys who never quite reach the top grade, but who have a living to make."

"They'd be better off in a factory, earning a fair wage on a production line," said Ballerton, with heavy, reasonable-sounding humour. "But they like wearing those bright silks," he added. "People turn to look at them, and it flatters their little egos."

There was a gasp out in the dark studio at this ungentlemanly blow below the belt, and I saw that the red spot on the camera pointing at me was glowing. I raised a smile for Mr. Ballerton then, as sweet and forgiving a smile as ever turned the other cheek.

Kemp-Lore turned to me. "And what do you say to that, Rob?"

I spoke vehemently, and straight from the heart. "Give me a horse and a race to ride it in, and I don't care if I wear silks or . . . or . . . pyjamas. I don't care if I don't earn much money, or if I break my bones, or if I have to starve to keep my weight down. All I care about is racing . . . and winning, if I can."

There was a small silence. Both of them were staring at me. John Ballerton looked as if a wasp had stung him, and Kemp-Lore's expression I could not read at all. Then he turned smoothly back to his

camera and slid the familiar smile into place, but I felt irrationally that something important had taken place, though I had not the slightest clue to what it was.

Kemp-Lore was very soon closing the programme and the hot spotlight flicked off. Kemp-Lore stood up and stretched and grinned round at us all. "Well, John. Well, Rob. Thank you both very much."

I reflected again how superlative he was at his job. By encouraging Ballerton to needle me he had drawn from me, for the ears of a few million strangers, a more soul-baring statement than I would ever have made privately to a close friend.

A good deal of backslapping followed before I left the television building. I wondered why it was that I felt more apprehensive than I had before the show started.

CHAPTER V

THREE WEEKS and a day after the broadcast, Pip Pankhurst broke his leg. His horse, falling on him in the second race on a drizzly mid-November Saturday, made a thorough job of putting the champion jockey out of action for the bulk of the chasing season.

I had been watching from the stands and it would be untrue to say that I went down the stairs to the weighing-room with a calm heart. However sincere my pity for Pip's plight might be, the faint chance that I might take his place in the following race was playing hop, skip and jump with my pulse.

It was the big race of the week, a three-mile chase with a substantial prize. Pip's mount, which belonged to Lord Tirrold, was the rising star of the Axminster stable: a six-year-old brown gelding called Template, intelligent, fast, and a battler.

As I went into the weighing-room I saw James Axminster talking to another jockey. The jockey shook his head. Axminster turned slowly round until he saw me. He looked at me steadily, pondering, unsmiling. Then his eyes focused on someone to my left. He came to a decision and walked briskly past me.

Well, what did I expect? I had ridden for him for only four weeks. Three winners and a dozen also-rans. I was still the new boy, the

unsuccessful jockey of the television programme. I began to walk disconsolately over to the changing-room door.

Axminster had come up behind me. "Rob," he said in my ear, "Lord Tirrold says you can ride his horse."

The two men were looking at me appraisingly, knowing they were giving me the chance of a lifetime, not sure that I was up to it.

"Yes, sir," I said. I went on into the changing-room, queerly steadied by having believed that I had been passed over.

I rode better than I ever had before, but that was probably because Template was the best horse I had ever ridden. He was smooth and steely, and his rocketing spring over the first fence had me gasping; but by the second I was ready for it, exulting in it; as the chase went on I knew I had entered a new dimension of racing.

Axminster had given me no orders on how to shape the race. He said only, "Do the best you can, Rob."

As the pattern of the race shifted, I concentrated on keeping Template lying in about fourth position in the field, where I could see how everyone else was going. Template jumped himself into third place at the second last fence, and was still not under pressure. Coming towards the last I brought him to the outside, to give him a clear view, and urged him on. His stride quickened. He took off so far in front of the fence that for a heart-breaking second I was sure he would land squarely on top of it, but I had underestimated his power. He landed yards out on the far side, passing one horse in mid-air, collected himself without faltering and surged ahead.

There remained only a chestnut to be beaten. Only. Only the favourite. No disgrace, I fleetingly thought, to be beaten only by him. But I dug my knees into Template's sides and gave him two taps with the whip down his shoulder. He needed only this signal, I found, to put every ounce into getting to the front. He stretched his neck out and flattened his stride, and I knelt on his withers and squeezed him, moving with his rhythm, keeping my whip still for fear of disturbing him. He put his head in front of the chestnut's five strides from the winning post, and kept it there.

There was a cheer as we went into the unsaddling enclosure, and some complimentary things were said, but I felt too weak and breathless

to enjoy them. No race had ever before taken so much out of me. Nor given me so much, either.

Surprisingly, Lord Tirrold and Axminster were almost subdued.

"That was all right, then," said Axminster, smiling.

"He's a wonderful horse," I said fervently.

"Yes, he is," said Lord Tirrold, patting the dark sweating neck.

Axminster said, "Don't hang about then, Rob. Go and weigh in. You're riding in the next race. And the one after." I stared at him. "You're standing in for Pip until he comes back," he said.

"WHAT A nerve!" Tick-Tock said. He was waiting for me to change at the end of the afternoon.

"Six weeks ago you were scrounging rides. Then you get yourself on television as a failure and make it obvious you aren't one. Newspapers write columns about your version of the creed. Now you do the understudy-into-star routine, and all that jazz. Three winners in one afternoon!"

I grinned at him. "What goes up must come down." I tied my tie and looked in the mirror at the fatuous smile I could not remove from my face. Days like this don't happen very often, I thought.

"Let's go and see Pip," I said abruptly.

I THINK Axminster had trouble persuading some of his owners that I was capable of taking Pip's place, because I didn't ride all of the stable's horses at first. But as the weeks went by, fewer and fewer other jockeys were engaged. I became used to riding three or four races a day, to going back to my digs contentedly tired in body and mind and waking the next morning with eagerness. I even became used to winning. It was no longer a rarity for me.

While the gods heaped good fortune on my head, others fared badly. Grant Oldfield had offered neither explanation nor apology for hitting me. He withdrew more and more into himself. Oddly enough his riding skill had not degenerated with his character. He rode the same rough, tough race; but he had begun to take out his anger on his mounts, and twice during November he was called before the stewards for "excessive use of the whip."



The Oldfield volcano erupted, as far as I was concerned, one cold afternoon in the car park at Warwick. Tick-Tock had gone to a different meeting, and I had the Mini-Cooper which he and I had bought together. I was late leaving the meeting as I had won the last race and by the time I got there the car park was empty except for our car and another next to it.

I went towards the Mini still smiling to myself with the pleasure of this latest win, and I did not see Grant until I was quite close to him. A rear wheel lay on the grass and he was kneeling beside his car with a spare. He saw me coming, and he saw me smiling, and he thought I was laughing at him. I could see the uncontrollable fury rise in his face. He got to his feet and then bent forward and picked up a tyre lever.

"I'll help you with your tyre, if you like," I said mildly.

For answer he took a step sideways, swung his arm in a sort of backward chop, and smashed the tyre lever through the back window of the Mini-Cooper.

My anger rose quick and hot and I took a step towards Grant. He turned to face me squarely and lifted the tyre lever again.

"Don't be an ass, Grant," I said reasonably. "Put that thing down and let's get on with changing your tyre."

"You —" he said, "you took my job."

"No," I said. But before I could add more he slashed forward and downward at my head.

I think that at that moment he must have been truly insane, for had the blow connected he would surely have killed me. I ducked, and the lever whistled past my right ear. His arm returned in a backhand. I ducked again and this time, as he swung wide, I stepped close and hit him hard just below his breastbone. He grunted and the arm with the lever dropped. I hit him on the side of the neck with the edge of my hand. He went down on his hands and knees, and then sprawled on the grass.

He was breathing heavily and moaning. I squatted and said close to his ear, "Grant, why did you get the sack from Axminster?"

He mumbled something I could not hear. I repeated my question. He said distinctly, "He said I passed on the message."

"What message?"

His lips moved but he said nothing more.

I decided that I could not just drive off and leave him lying there. I put the spare wheel on, and slung the jack and the punctured wheel into the boot of his car. I shook him and called his name. He opened his eyes. I propped him up against his car. He looked utterly worn out.

"O God," he said, "O God." It sounded like a true prayer.

"If you went to see a psychiatrist," I said gently, "you could get some help."

He didn't answer; but neither did he resist when I helped him into the Mini-Cooper. I asked him where he lived, and he told me. Luckily it was only thirty miles away, and I drew up where he directed outside a semi-detached featureless house on the outskirts of a small town. There were no lights in the windows.

"Isn't your wife in?" I asked.

"She left me," he said absently. Then his jaw tensed and he said, "Mind your own — business." He jerked the door open, climbed out and slammed it noisily. He shouted, "Take your bloody do-gooding off. I don't want your help!"

I drove off but I had only started down the road when I reluctantly decided that he shouldn't be left alone.

In the centre of the little town I stopped and asked where a doctor lived. I was directed to a house where a youngish, capable-looking man answered the door.

"Are you by any chance Grant Oldfield's doctor?" I asked.

He said at once, "I'm Parnell. Yes, I'm his doctor."

I introduced myself and said, "Could you please come and take a look at him. He . . . er . . . he was knocked out at the races."

"Half a mo," he said. He came back with his medical bag. We got in the Mini-Cooper and I told him how Grant had smashed the back window and explained how I had come to bring him home.

He listened in silence. Then he said, "Why did he attack you?"

"He seems to believe I took his job. I didn't. He lost it months before it was offered to me."

When we reached Grant's house it was still in darkness. There was no answer when we rang the bell.

Then a faint rustle in the dark front garden caught our attention,

and with the aid of the doctor's torch we found Grant huddling in the bordering privet hedge.

"Come along, old chap," said the doctor, and pulled him to his feet. He found a bunch of keys in Grant's pockets, and handed them to me. I unlocked the front door and turned on the lights. The doctor guided Grant into the first room we came to, the dining-room. Grant collapsed on a chair and laid his head down on the table. Parnell felt his pulse, lifted up his eyelid and ran both hands round the base of his skull. Grant moved irritably when Parnell's fingers touched the place where I had hit him. Parnell stepped back a pace. "There's nothing physically wrong with him as far as I can see, except for what is going to be a stiff neck. We'd better get him to bed and I'll give him a sedative. In the morning I'll arrange for him to see someone who can sort out his troubles for him. You'd better give me a ring during the night if there's any change in his condition."

"I?" I said. "I'm not staying here all night"

"Oh yes, I think so, don't you?" he said cheerfully. "Who else? After all, you hit him, and you cared enough to bring him home."

Put like that, it was difficult to refuse. We took Grant upstairs. His bedroom was filthy. Tangled sheets and blankets were piled on the unmade bed and dirty clothes were scattered about.

I made up the bed with clean sheets I found in the linen cupboard, while Parnell undressed Grant as far as his underpants and made him get into bed. Then, opening his case, he shook out two capsules and made Grant swallow them. "Those pills ought to keep him quiet for a bit," he said. "Give him two more when he wakes up. Have a good night," he added with a callous grin.

I spent a miserable evening and dined off a pint of milk I found on the back doorstep. Several times in the night I went softly in to see how Grant was doing, but he slept peacefully. Eventually I fell uneasily asleep myself.

Dr. Parnell arrived with a nurse at seven. He had also brought eggs, bacon, bread, milk and coffee, and an electric razor.

"All mod. cons," he said cheerfully.

So I went back to the races washed, shaved and fed. But, thinking of Grant as I had left him, not in a happy frame of mind.

CHAPTER VI

"THERE's a shortage of jockeys just now," said Axminster.

We were on our way to Sandown, discussing who should ride for him the following week.

"You'd almost think there was a hoodoo on the whole tribe," he said. "Art shot himself, Pip's broken his leg, Grant's had a breakdown. There's Peter Cloony . . . but I've heard he's unreliable, and Danny Higgs bets too much, they say, and Ingersoll doesn't always try, so I've been told. . . ."

In the weeks since Pip broke his leg I had come to like the trainer better every day. Not only was he superb at his job, but he was never moody and always said directly what he thought. He had quite soon told me to drop the "sir" and stick to "James." Once as we drove back from Birmingham races, we passed some posters advertising a concert.

"Conductor, Sir Trelawny Finn," he read aloud. "No relation, I suppose," he said jokingly.

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact, he's my uncle," I said.

There was a dead silence. Then he said, "And Caspar Finn?"

"My father." A pause. "And Dame Olivia Cottin is my mother," I added, matter-of-factly.

"Well," he said, "you keep it very quiet."

"It's really the other way round," I said cheerfully. "They like to keep me quiet."

"All the same," he said thoughtfully, "it explains quite a lot about you. Your air of confidence . . . and why you've said so little about yourself."

I said, "I'd be very glad . . . James . . . if you'd not let my parentage loose in the weighing-room, as a favour to them."

He had not, and he had accepted me more firmly as a friend from then on. So when he ran through the reported shortcomings of the other jockeys, it was with some confidence that I said, "Do you know all these things for a fact?"

"Well, Peter Clooney was late for two races a few weeks back."

I told him about Peter's bad luck in twice being delayed by a

vehicle stuck across the lane. "As far as I know," I said, "he hasn't been late since. Who told you he was unreliable?"

"Oh, I don't know. Corin Kellar for one. Ballerton too. It's common knowledge."

"How about Danny Higgs, then?" I said.

"He bets too heavily," James said positively. "Corin says he never puts him up because of it."

"And Tick-Tock Ingersoll?" I said. "Who says he doesn't always try?"

He didn't answer at once. Then he said, "Why shouldn't I believe Corin? He depends as we all do on good jockeys. He wouldn't deny himself the use of people like Cloony or Higgs if he didn't have a good reason."

I thought for a few moments, and then said, "I know it's really none of my business, but would you mind very much telling me why you dropped Grant Oldfield? He told me himself that it was something to do with a message, but he didn't explain."

"A message? Oh yes, he passed on the message. You know, if we had a fancied runner he would tip off a professional backer. Then the owner didn't get good odds on his money because the professional was there before him and spoiled the market. Grant had to go. It was a pity."

"How did you discover it was Grant passing on the information?"

"Kemp-Lore found out more or less by accident while he was working on one of his programmes. He told me very apologetically, and just said it would be wiser not to let Grant know too much. But you can't work with a jockey and keep secrets from him."

"What did Grant say when you sacked him?" I asked.

"He denied the whole thing very indignantly, of course."

"Did you talk to the professional backer in question?" I asked.

"I did. You see, I didn't want to believe it. But Lubbock, the professional, did admit that he had been paying Grant for tips."

It seemed conclusive enough, but I had a feeling that I had missed something, somewhere. I changed the subject. "Going back to Art," I said, "why was he always having rows with Corin?"

"I don't know," James said reflectively. "I heard Corin say once or twice that Art didn't ride to orders. Perhaps it was that."

He glanced at me. "What are you getting at?"

"It seems to me sometimes that there is too much of a pattern," I said. "Too many jockeys are affected by rumours. You said yourself that there seems to be a hoodoo on the whole tribe."

"I didn't mean it seriously," he protested. "You're imagining things. And as for rumours, let me remind you that Ingersoll was called in before the stewards last week for easing his mount out of third place. John Ballerton owned the horse and he was very annoyed about it, he told me so himself."

I sighed. Tick-Tock's version was that since Corin had told him not to overwork the horse, which was not fully fit, he had decided that he ought not to drive the horse just for the sake of finishing third. After the inquiry, changing with the wind as usual, Corin had been heard condemning Tick-Tock's action.

"I hope I am quite wrong about it all," I said slowly. "But if you ever hear any rumours about me, will you remember what I think and make quite sure they're true before you believe them?"

"All right," he said, humouring me. "I think it's nonsense, but I'll agree to it." He drove in silence for a while, and then said with an impatient shake of his big head, "No one stands to gain anything by trying to ruin jockeys. It's pointless."

"I know," I said. "Pointless."

DURING the week before Christmas, when there was no racing, I spent several days with my parents. They greeted me with their usual friendly detachment and left me to my own devices.

Joanna's time was tangled inextricably with several performances in different places of the "Christmas Oratorio." I managed to hook her only for one chilly morning's walk in the park, and a Christmasy lunch at the Savoy afterwards.

She was less serene than usual, and there was a sort of brittleness in her manner which I couldn't understand. I waited until the coffee came, and then said casually, "What's up, Joanna?"

She was silent. Finally she said, "Brian wants to marry me."

I knew she had been seeing a man named Brian, but I did not know what their relationship was.

"I don't know what to do," she said. "He says it's irresponsible not to want to marry at my age, and I say I'll gladly marry him if he lets me keep on with my work and come and go as I please. But he sees me as the complete housewife. He wants me to be respectable and conventional and . . . stuffy." The last word came out explosively, steeped in contempt.

"How much do you love him?" I asked painfully.

"I don't know," she said unhappily. Then seeing the movement in my face, she said, "Oh hell . . . Rob, I'm sorry. It's so long since you said anything . . . I thought you didn't still. . . ."

"Never mind," I said. "It can't be helped."

"What . . . what do you think I should do?"

"It's quite clear," I said, "that you should not marry Brian if you can't bear the prospect of the life he intends you to lead."

But no advice I could give her would be unbiased, and she must have known it. She left presently to go to a rehearsal, and I walked slowly back to the flat. The sort of marriage which Joanna had offered Brian, and which he spurned, was what I most wanted in the world. Why, I wondered disconsolately, was life so ruddy unfair.

ON THE day after Christmas, Template won the King Chase, one of the ten top races of the year. It put him conclusively into the star class, and it didn't do me any harm either.

The race had been televised, and afterwards, as was his custom, Maurice Kemp-Lore interviewed me as the winning jockey; on the following day a number of trainers I had not yet ridden for offered me mounts and I began to feel at last as though I were being accepted as a jockey in my own right.

I had, of course, my share of falls during this period. The worst one happened one Saturday afternoon in January, when the hurdler I was riding tripped over a flight of hurdles and flung me off on to my head. I woke up dizzily as the First Aid men lifted me into the ambulance on a stretcher, and for a moment or two could not remember where I was. James's face looming over me as they carried me into the First Aid room brought me back to earth with a click, and I asked him if his horse was all right.

"Yes," he said, "how about you?"

"Fine," I said cheerfully. Actually I felt dizzy and shivery, but concealing one's true state of health from trainers was an occupational habit, and I knew I would be fit again to ride on Monday.

The only person who was openly annoyed at my run of good luck was John Ballerton. I had heard that he said to Corin and Maurice Kemp-Lore in the members' bar at Kempton, "Finn isn't worth all this fuss; he'll come down just as quickly as he's gone up, you'll see."

In view of this I was astonished when Corin telephoned to say, "Ballerton wants you to ride Shantytown at Dunstable tomorrow. I must say, I don't understand why, as he's been so set against you. But he was quite definite."

My first instinct was to refuse to ride the horse, but I couldn't think of a reasonable excuse, as Corin had found out I was free before he told me whose the horse was. A point-blank refusal would give Ballerton a genuine grievance against me.

Shantytown was no Template. His uncertain manner and unreliable jumping were described to me in unreassuring terms by Tick-Tock on the way to Dunstable the following morning.

"Dogmeat on the hoof," he said cheerfully. "Any time he's won or placed it's because he's dragged his jockey's arms out of the sockets by a blast-off start and kept right on going."

We were both aware that a few weeks ago riding Shantytown would have been Tick-Tock's doubtful pleasure, not mine. Since his parade before the stewards for not pushing his horse all out into third place, he had been ignored by Corin Kellar.

When it came to the race, on a raw January afternoon, Shantytown was not what I had been led to expect. Far from pulling my arms out of their sockets, he seemed to me to be in danger of falling asleep. The start caught him flat-footed, and I had to boot him into the first fence. He rose to it fairly well, but was slow in his recovery, and it was the same at every jump. We finished ingloriously last.

A hostile reception met us. John Ballerton glowered like a thunderstorm. Corin, wearing an anxious, placatory expression, was obviously going to use me as the scapegoat for the horse's failure.

"What the hell do you think you were doing?" Ballerton said as I slid to the ground and began to unbuckle the girths.

"I'm sorry, sir," I said. "He wouldn't go any faster."

"Don't talk such bloody rubbish," he said. "Were you afraid to let him go, or something? If you can't ride a decent race on a horse that pulls, why do you try?"

I said, "The horse didn't pull. There was no life in him."

"Kellar," Ballerton shouted, "isn't my horse a puller?"

"He is," said Corin, not meeting my eyes. "I thought he'd win."

They looked at me accusingly. Corin must have seen that the horse had run listlessly, but he was not going to admit it.

Ballerton narrowed his eyes and said, "I asked you to ride Shantytown against my better judgment and only because Maurice Kemp-Lore insisted I had been misjudging you. Well, you'll never ride another horse of mine, I promise you that." He turned on his heel and stalked off, followed by Corin.

By the end of the afternoon the puzzlement I had felt over Shantytown's dead running had changed to a vague uneasiness, for neither of the other two horses I rode afterwards did anything like as well as had been expected. Both finished nearly last, and although their owners were a great deal nicer about it than Ballerton had been, their disappointment was obvious.

On the following day the run of flops continued. All three horses I rode ran badly. Runs of bad luck are commoner in racing than good ones, and the fact that six of my mounts in a row had made a showing far below their usual capabilities would not have attracted much notice had it not been for John Ballerton.

After the fifth race I found him standing close by the weighing-room with some cronies. Their heads turned towards me and Ballerton said something and the word "disgrace" floated across clearly. I gave no sign of having heard but I wondered what effect Ballerton's complaints would have on the number of horses I was asked to ride. He was not a man to keep his grudges to himself.

I went up to the stands to watch the last race and Maurice Kemp-Lore came across to talk to me. "Bad luck, Rob," he said. "I hear the good word I put in for you with John Ballerton has gone awry."

"You can say that again," I agreed. "But thanks for trying."

I could hear a high-pitched wheeze as he drew breath into his lungs, and I realized it was the first time I had encountered him in an asthmatic attack. I felt sorry for him.

"Are James's plans fixed for the Midwinter Cup?" he continued casually, his eyes on the horses. I smiled. But he had his job to do, I supposed, and there was no harm in telling him.

"Template runs, all being well," I said.

"And you ride him?"

"Yes," I agreed.

"How is Pip getting along?" he asked, wheezing quietly.

"They think his leg is mending well. He might be ready in time for Cheltenham, but of course he won't be fit for the Midwinter."

"What chance do you give Template in that race?" Maurice asked, watching the start through his race glasses.

"Oh, I hope he'll win," I said grinning. "You can quote me."

"I probably will," he agreed. We watched the race together, and such was the effect of his charm and personality that I left Dunstable cheerfully, the dismal two days' results temporarily forgotten.

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS a false security. My run of good luck had ended with a vengeance, and Dunstable proved to be only the fringe of the whirlpool. During the next two weeks I rode seventeen horses. Fifteen of them finished in the rear of the field, and in only two cases was this a fair result. I couldn't understand it. As far as I knew there was no difference in my riding, and it was unbelievable that my mounts should all lose their form simultaneously. I could feel my confidence oozing away as each day passed.

There was one grey mare I particularly liked riding because of the speed of her reactions. She was sweet-tempered and silken-mouthed, and jumped magnificently. While we watched her walk round the parade ring her owner, a jolly Norfolk farmer, commiserated with me on my bad luck and said, "Never mind, lad. The mare will not fail you. You'll do all right on her, never fear."

I believed I would do all right on her, too, but that day she might have been another horse. Same colour, same size, same pretty head. But no zip. It was like driving a car with four flat tyres. The jolly farmer looked less jolly and more pensive when I brought her back. "She's not been last ever before, lad," he said reproachfully.

We looked her over, but there was nothing wrong with her that we could see. "Are you sure you gave her her head, lad?" the farmer said doubtfully.

"Yes," I said. "But she had no enthusiasm at all today."

The farmer shook his head, doleful and puzzled.

Failures like these were too numerous to escape attention, and as the days passed I noticed a change in the way people spoke to me. I could almost feel the wave of gossip I left in my wake. I didn't know what they were saying, so I asked Tick-Tock.

"Pay no attention," he said. "Ride a couple of winners and they'll be throwing the laurel wreaths again. It's bad-patchville, that's all."

One Thursday evening James telephoned and asked me to come up to his house. I walked up, wondering miserably whether he, like two other trainers that day, was going to find an excuse for putting someone else up on his horses. I couldn't blame him.

James showed me into his office, shut the door, and faced me almost aggressively across the familiar room. "I hear," he said without preamble, "that you have lost your nerve."

I stared at James and didn't answer. It was not a surprise. I had guessed what was being said about me.

"You have been showing the classic symptoms," he went on. "Trailing round nearly last, pulling up for no clear reason, never going fast enough to keep warm. A few weeks ago I promised you that if I heard any rumours about you I would make sure they were true before I believed them. Well, I heard this rumour last Saturday. Several people sympathized with me because my jockey had lost his nerve. I didn't believe it. I have watched you closely ever since."

I waited dumbly for the axe. During the week I had been last five times out of seven. He sat down heavily and said, "Oh, sit down, Rob. Don't just stand there like a stricken ox, saying nothing. I expected you to deny it. Is it true, then?"

I sat down. "No," I said.

"It isn't enough to say no, Rob. You owe me an explanation."

"I can't explain," I said despairingly. "Every horse I've ridden in the last three weeks seems to have had its feet dipped in treacle. The difference is in the horses . . . I am the same." It sounded futile and incredible, even to me.

"You have certainly lost your touch," he said slowly. "Perhaps Ballerton is right"

"Ballerton?" I said sharply.

"He's always said you were not as good as you were made out to be, and that I'd given you a top job when you weren't ready for it."

"I'm sorry, James," I said.

"They say the fall you had three weeks ago frightened you."

"I didn't give that fall another thought," I said.

"Then why, Rob, why?"

But I shook my head. I didn't know why.

He stood up and opened a cupboard which contained bottles and glasses, poured out two whiskies, and handed one to me.

"I can't convince myself yet that you've lost your nerve," he said. "Before I took you on, wasn't it your stock in trade to ride all the rough and dangerous horses that trainers didn't want to risk their best jockeys on? That's why I first engaged you. You aren't the sort of man to lose his nerve suddenly and for nothing. I remember the way you rode Template that first time. . . ."

I smiled, realizing how deeply I wanted him not to lose faith in me. "I feel as if I'm fighting a fog," I said. "I tried everything I knew today to get those horses to go faster, but they were all half dead. Or I was. I don't know . . . it's a pretty ghastly mess."

"I'm afraid it is," he said gloomily. "And I'm having owner trouble about it, as you can imagine."

"What rides can I still expect?" I said.

He sighed. "I don't exactly know. Broome's out of touch, on a Mediterranean cruise. You can have all his runners. And my two as well. For the rest, we'll have to wait and see."

I could hardly bring myself to say it, but I had to know. "How about Template?" I asked.

He looked at me steadily. "I haven't heard from George Tirrold," he said. "I think he will agree that he can't chuck you out after you've won so many races for him. Unless something worse happens," he finished judiciously, "I think you can still count on riding Template in the Midwinter a week from Saturday. But if you bring him in last in that . . . it will be the end."

I stood up and said, "I'll win that race. Whatever the cost, I'll win it."

WE WENT silently together to the races the following day, but when we arrived I discovered that two of my three prospective mounts were mine no longer. I stood on the stands and watched both the horses run well.

I went out to ride James's runner in the fourth race absolutely determined to win. I knew him to be a competent jumper and a willing battler in a close finish.

We came in last. It was an effort to go back and face the music. James, his face blank, said, "It can't go on, Rob. I'm very sorry. I'll have to get someone else to ride my horses tomorrow."

I nodded. He gave me a searching, puzzled look, tinged for the first time with pity. I found it unbearable.

I took my saddle back to the weighing-room, aware of the glances which followed me. Conversation died when I walked in. I went over to my peg and began to take off my colours. It was surely impossible, I thought confusedly, to be subconsciously afraid. But the shattering fact remained that none of the many horses I had ridden since I had been knocked out in that fall had made any show at all. There were too many of them for it to be a coincidence, especially as those I had been removed from had done well.

I went back to Kensington in a mood of deep despair. There was no one in the flat and no food in the refrigerator.

I took a whisky bottle out of the cupboard and lay down on the sofa in the sitting-room. I uncorked the bottle and took two large gulps. The spirit scorched down to my empty stomach. I put the bottle on the floor beside me. Getting drunk wouldn't do any good. Nothing would do any good. Everything was finished.

I spent a long time looking at my hands. Hands. The touch they

had for horses had earned me my living all my adult life. I knew no other skill but riding, nor had ever wanted any. I felt more than whole on horseback: more speed, more strength, more courage . . . I winced at the word. A saddle was to me as the sea to a fish: home. Without a racing saddle, I thought bleakly, I am incomplete.

And what of the future? I could return during the next week and race on one or two of James's horses, if he would still let me, and perhaps even on Template in the Midwinter. But I no longer expected to do well. Better to start a new life. But a new life doing what? Whatever I did, I would drag round with me the knowledge that I had totally failed at what I had tried hardest to do.

After a long time I stood up, put the whisky bottle back in the cupboard and went out to a pub where I was sure I was not known by sight. I ordered ham sandwiches but they stuck tastelessly in my mouth.

The fact that it was Friday had meant nothing to me all evening, and the approach of nine o'clock went unnoticed. But just when I had pushed away the sandwiches, someone turned up the volume of the television set; a bunch of racing fans made shooshing noises and Maurice Kemp-Lore's features materialized on the screen.

"Good evening," Kemp-Lore said, the spellbinding smile in place. "This evening we are going to talk about handicapping, and I have here two well-informed men who look at weights and measures from opposing angles. The first is Mr. Charles Jenkinson, an official handicapper. He decides upon the weight each horse must carry in a race." Mr. Jenkinson's face appeared briefly on the screen. "And the other is the well-known trainer, Corin Kellar." Corin's thin face glowed with satisfaction.

"Mr. Jenkinson," said Maurice, "will explain how he builds a handicap. And Mr. Kellar will tell you how he tries to avoid having his horses defeated by their weights."

I listened to Jenkinson with only half my mind, and Corin had been speaking for some moments before I paid much attention to him. ". . . Horses from my stable always do their best to win."

"But surely you don't insist on their being ridden hard at the end when they've no chance at all?" said Maurice.

"As hard as necessary, yes," Corin asserted. "Not very long ago I

dismissed a jockey for not riding hard at the end when he could have come third" His voice droned on, and I thought of Tick-Tock, thrown to the stewards for obeying orders too conscientiously and now having trouble getting other trainers to trust him. I thought of Art, driven to death; and the active dislike I already felt for Corin Kellar sharpened into hatred.

"One is always in the hands of one's jockey," Corin was saying. "You can slave away for weeks preparing a horse for a race and then a jockey can undo it all with one stupid mistake."

"But there is always some explanation for a jockey's not getting the most out of a horse," Maurice interrupted. "Whatever the reason, trivial, like a mistake, or more serious, like a failure of resolution at a crucial point"

"No guts, you mean?" said Corin flatly. "I'd say that that would be as obvious to a handicapper as to everyone else. There's a case in point now . . ." he hesitated, but Maurice did not try to stop him, "a case now where everything a certain jockey rides comes in last. He's lost his nerve, you see. Well, you can't tell me any handicapper thinks those particular horses are not as good as they were. Of course they are. It's just the rider who's going downhill."

I could feel the blood rush to my head.

"What's usual in these cases, Mr. Jenkinson?" Maurice asked.

"I . . . that is . . . they aren't usually as blatant as this. It really isn't a thing I can discuss here."

"Where better?" said Maurice persuasively. "We all know that this poor chap took a toss three weeks ago and has ridden . . . er . . . ineffectively . . . ever since. Surely you'd have to take that into account when you are handicapping those horses?"

While the camera focused on Jenkinson, Corin's voice said, "I'll be interested to know what you decide. One of those horses was mine, you know. It was a shocking exhibition. Finn won't be riding for me again, or for anyone else either, I shouldn't wonder."

Jenkinson said uneasily, "I don't think we should mention names," and Maurice cut in quickly, saying, "No, no. I agree. Better not." But the damage was done.

"Well, thank you both very much for giving us your time this

evening," he said, and slid expertly into his closing sentences, but I was no longer listening. Between them he and Corin had hammered in the nails on the ruins of my career, and watching them at it on the glaring little screen had given me a blinding headache.

I stumbled out into the street, and walked slowly back to the dark, empty flat; without switching on any lights I lay down fully dressed on my bed. My head throbbed. I groaned aloud.

It was a long way down from my window to the street. Five stories. A long, quick way down. I could hear a chiming clock counting away the quarter-hours. It struck ten, eleven, twelve, one, two. Five stories down. But however bad things were, that way wasn't for me. I shut my eyes, and finally, after the long despairing hours, drifted into an exhausted, dream-filled sleep.

I woke less than two hours later, and heard the clock strike four. My headache had gone, and my mind felt sharp and clear. Somewhere between sleeping and waking I found I had regained myself, come back to the life-saving certainty that I was the person I thought I was, and not the cracked-up mess that everyone else believed. And that being so, I thought in puzzlement, there must be some other explanation of my troubles. All—*all* I had to do was find it. I began, at long last, to use my brain. In the morning I went to see a psychiatrist.

CHAPTER VIII

I HAD known the psychiatrist all my life as he was a friend of my father. At eight o'clock I telephoned him and asked urgently to see him. He said to come at once and a quarter of an hour later I was sitting with him in his consulting-room.

"Suppose . . ." I began, and stopped. It didn't seem so easy, now that I was there. What had seemed obvious at five in the morning, in the full light of day was going to sound preposterous.

"Yes?" he waited for me calmly.

"Suppose I had a sister," I said, "who was as good a musician as Mother and Father, and I was the only one in the entire family to lack their talent—as you know I am—and I felt they despised me for lacking it, how would you expect me to act?"

"They don't despise you," he protested.

"No . . . but if they did, would there be any way in which I could persuade them—and myself—that I had a very good excuse for not being a musician?"

"Oh, yes," he said instantly, "I'd expect you to do exactly what you have done. Find something you can do, and pursue it fanatically until in your own sphere you reach the standard of your family in theirs."

I felt as if I'd been hit in the solar plexus. So simple an explanation of my compulsion to race had never occurred to me.

"That . . . that isn't what I meant," I said helplessly. "But when I come to think of it, I see it is true." I paused. "What I really meant to ask was, could I, when I was growing up, have developed a physical infirmity to explain away my failure?"

He looked at me intently for a few moments. "You had better stop waltzing round it and ask me your question straight out," he said.

"There are two," I said. "Could a boy whose family were all terrific cross-country riders develop asthma to hide a fear of horses?" My mouth was dry. So very much depended on his answers.

He didn't answer at once. He said, "What's the other question?"

"Could that boy, as a man, develop such a loathing for steeplechase jockeys that he would try to smash their careers? Even if, as you said, he had found something else which he could do well?"

"It obviously matters so desperately to you, Robert, that I can't give you an answer without knowing more about it. You must tell me why you ask these questions."

I told him what had happened to my friends and to me. And I told him about Maurice Kemp-Lore. "He comes from a family who ride as soon as they walk, but horses give him asthma, and that, everyone knows, is why he doesn't ride himself."

I paused, but as he made no comment, I went on. "You can't help being drawn to him. You can't imagine the spell of his personality unless you've felt it. He has the ear of everyone from the stewards down . . . and I think he uses his influence to sow seeds of doubt about jockeys' characters."

"Go on," he said, his face showing nothing.

"The men who seem to be especially under his spell are Corin Kellar,

a trainer, and John Ballerton, a member of the ruling body. I think Kemp-Lore picked them as friends solely because they had the right sort of mean-mindedness for broadcasting every damaging opinion he insinuated into their heads. I think all the rumours start with Kemp-Lore, and that even the substance behind them is his work. Why isn't he content with what he has? The jockeys he is hurting like him. Why does he need to destroy them?"

He said, "If this were a hypothetical case I would tell you that such a man could both hate and envy his father—and his sister—and have felt both these emotions from early childhood. But because he knows these feelings are wrong he represses them, and the aggression is transferred to people who show the same qualities and abilities that he hates in his father. Such individuals can be helped. They can be understood, and treated, and forgiven."

"I can't forgive him," I said. "And I'm going to stop him."

He considered me. "You must make sure of your facts," he said. "At present you are just guessing. And as I've had no opportunity to talk to him you'll get no more from me than an admission that your suspicions of Kemp-Lore are *possibly* correct. You are making a very serious accusation. You need cast-iron facts. Until you have them, there is always the chance that you have interpreted what has happened to you as malice from outside in order to explain away your own inner failure."

"Don't psychiatrists ever take a simple view?" I said, sighing.

He shook his head. "Few things are simple."

"I'll get the facts," I said and stood up and thanked him.

At the door he said, "Go gently, Robert. If you are right about Kemp-Lore, you must persuade him to ask for treatment."

I said flatly, "I can't look at it from your point of view. I don't think of Kemp-Lore as ill, but as wicked."

"Where illness ends and crime begins" He shrugged. "It has been debated for centuries. But take care, Robert."

OVER A TRIPLE order of eggs and bacon in a near-by café, I bent my mind to the problem of how the cast-iron facts were to be dug up. On reflection, there seemed to be precious few of them to work on.

Using the café's telephone, I rang up Tick-Tock. "If you are not using the car this afternoon I want to call at some stables. About six altogether, I think, apart from Axminster's. And Kellar's. I'll have to go there as well."

"You've got a nerve," said Tick-Tock.

"Thanks," I said. "You're about the only person who thinks so."

"Damn it . . . I didn't mean . . . But it's no use going to any stables today. The trainers will all be at the races."

"Yes, I sincerely hope so," I agreed. "I'll come down to Newbury by train and pick the car up."

"What are you up to?" he asked suspiciously.

"Retrieving the fallen fortunes of the House of Finn," I said.

When I stepped off the train at Newbury Tick-Tock was waiting. He opened the car door. "Where to?" he said.

"You're not coming," I said.

"I certainly am. This car is half mine. Where it goes, I go." He was clearly determined. "Where to?"

"Well . . ." I showed him a list I had made on the train. "These are the stables I want to go to."

"Phew," he said, looking at the list, "we'll never cover this lot in one day." He let in the clutch and drove off to his place where we collected some overnight things. Then Tick-Tock pointed the Mini-Cooper's blunt nose towards the first stable on the list, Corin Kellar's, in Hampshire.

"Now," he said. "Tell me. The works."

"No," I said. "I'm not going to tell you why we're going. Listen and watch, and then you tell me."

We arrived at Corin's stable while the lads were doing up the horses after the second morning exercise. Arthur, the head lad, was crossing the yard with a bucket of oats when we climbed out of the car, and his usual welcoming smile got half-way to his eyes before he remembered. "The guvnor's gone to the races," he said awkwardly.

"I know," I said. "Can I speak to Davey?" Davey was the lad who looked after Shantytown.

"Fourth box from the end over that side," Arthur said doubtfully. We found Davey tossing the straw bed round the big chestnut. We

leaned over the bottom half of the door, and watched Davey's expression, too, change from warmth to disgust.

I said, "Davy, there's a quid for you if you feel like talking a bit. About the day I rode Shantytown at Dunstable."

"I remember the day," he said offensively.

I ignored his tone, and took a pound note out of my wallet and gave it to him. He shrugged, and thrust it into his pocket. "Now, tell me what happened from the moment you set off from here until I got up on Shantytown in the parade ring."

He shrugged again, but said, "We went in the horse van from here to Dunstable, and unloaded the horses, two of them, in the stables there, and went and got a cuppa in the canteen. Then I went back to the stables and got Shantytown and put on his paddock clothing and led him out into the paddock. . . ." His voice was bored as he recited the everyday racing routine of his job.

"Could anyone have given Shantytown anything to eat or drink in the stables, say a bucket of water just before the race?" I asked.

"Don't be stupid. Of course not. Who ever heard of giving a horse anything to eat or drink before a race?"

"How tight is the security on the Dunstable stables?" I asked. "Would anyone but a lad or a trainer get in there?"

"No," he said, "it's as tight as a drum."

"Go on then," I said. "We've got you as far as the paddock."

"Well, I walked the horse round the assembly ring for a bit, waiting for the guvnor to bring the saddle up from the weighing-room . . ." he smiled suddenly, as at some pleasant memory, "and then I took Shanty into the saddling box and the guvnor saddled up, and then I took Shanty down into the parade ring and walked him round until they called me over and you got up on him."

"What happened while you were walking round the assembly ring?" I asked. "Something you smile about when you remember it? The quid was for telling everything."

He sniffed. "It's nothing to do with racing. It was that chap on the telly, Maurice Kemp-Lore, he came over and spoke to me and admired Shanty and gave him a few sugar lumps, and he asked me what his chances were, and I said pretty good . . . more fool me. . . ."

Tick-Tock and I got back into the car and drove out of the yard. He flicked a glance at me and drove without speaking.

We reached the next yard on my list shortly before one o'clock, and disturbed the well-to-do farmer, who trained his own horses, just as he was about to sit down to his lunch. I had ridden and disgraced his best horse the previous week. After he had got over the unpleasant shock of finding me on his doorstep, he told me in a friendly enough fashion where I could find the lad who looked after the horse in question.

I gave the lad a pound to describe in detail what had happened on the day I had ridden his horse. He didn't see any sense in it but eventually I got him started, and then there was no stopping him.

Sandwiched between stripping off the paddock clothing and buckling up the saddle came the news that Maurice Kemp-Lore had lounged into the saddling box, said some complimentary things about the horse, meanwhile feeding the animal some lumps of sugar, and had drifted away again leaving behind him the usual feeling of friendliness and pleasure.

"How odd," said Tick-Tock pensively as we sped along the road to the next stable, eighty miles away. "How odd that Maurice Kemp-Lore" But he didn't finish the sentence; nor did I.

Two hours later, in Kent, we listened, for another pound, to a gaunt boy of twenty telling us what a smashing fellow that Maurice Kemp-Lore was, how interested he'd been in the horse, how kind to give him some sugar. Tick-Tock by now had become very interested.

"He drugged them," he said flatly, after a long silence, as he drove on to the Maidstone by-pass. "He drugged them to make it look as if . . . to make everyone believe you'd lost your nerve."

"Yes," I agreed.

"But it's impossible," he said. "Why on earth should he? It must be a coincidence that he gave sugar to three horses you rode."

"Maybe. We'll see," I said.

And we did see. We went to the stables of every horse (other than Axminster's) that I had ridden since Shantytown, talking to every lad concerned. And in every single case we heard that Maurice Kemp-Lore had made the lad's afternoon memorable by admiring the way the lad had looked after his horse, and by offering those tempting lumps of

sugar. It took us the whole of Saturday, and all Sunday morning, and we finished the last stable on my list on the edge of the Yorkshire moors at two o'clock in the afternoon.

On Monday I went alone to the Axminster stables to see James. He had just come in from supervising the morning exercise.

"Come into the office," he said. His tone was neutral. "I can't give you much to ride." His back was to me. "All the owners have cried off, except one. You'd better look at this; it came this morning." He held a letter out to me. It was from Lord Tirrold.

> Dear James,
>
> Since our telephone conversation I have been thinking over our decision to replace Finn on Template next Saturday, and I now consider that we should allow him to ride as originally planned. I do not want it said that I hurried to throw him out at the first possible moment, showing heartless ingratitude after his many wins on my horses. I am prepared for the disappointment of not winning the Midwinter. I would rather lose the race than the respect of the racing fraternity. . . .

I put the letter down. "He doesn't need to worry," I said thickly. "Template will win." I sat down in one of the battered arm-chairs. "James, there are a few things I'd like you to know. First, however bad it looks, I have not lost my nerve. Second, every single horse I have ridden since that fall three weeks ago has been doped. Not enough to be very noticeable, just enough to make it run like a slug. Third, the dope has been given to all the horses by the same man. Fourth, the dope has been given to the horses on sugar lumps."

James stood looking at me in shocked disbelief.

I said, "Before you conclude that I am out of my mind, do me the favour of calling in one of the lads whose horse I have ridden in the last three weeks, and see what he has to say."

He went to the door and shouted for someone to find Eddie, the lad who looked after a big chestnut I had ridden the previous week. In a moment the boy arrived. James gave me no chance to do the questioning. He said brusquely to Eddie, "When did you last talk to Rob?"

The boy looked scared. "N-not since l-l-last Friday."

"Very well, then. You remember when the big chestnut ran badly

last Wednesday week? Did anyone give the chestnut some sugar before the race?"

"Yes, sir," said Eddie thoughtfully. I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Who was it?"

"Maurice Kemp-Lore, sir. He said how well I looked after my horses, sir. He was leaning over the rails of the assembly ring and he spoke to me as I was going past. So I stopped, and he gave the chestnut some sugar, sir. I didn't think it would matter."

"Thank you, Eddie," said James, rather faintly. "No matter about the sugar . . . run along, now."

He looked at me blankly. The clock ticked.

Presently I said, "I've spent the last two days talking to the lads of all the horses I've ridden for other stables. Every one of them told me that Maurice Kemp-Lore gave the horse some lumps of sugar before I rode it. Tick-Tock came with me. You've only to ask him if you can't believe it from me."

"But Maurice never goes near horses," James protested.

"That's precisely what helped me to understand what was happening," I said. "I talked to Kemp-Lore at Dunstable just after Shantytown and two other horses had run hopelessly for me, and he was wheezing audibly. He had asthma. Which meant that he had recently been very close to horses. I didn't give it a thought at the time, but it means a packet to me now."

"But Maurice . . ." he repeated. "It's just not possible."

"It *is* possible," I said.

There were two things I wanted James to do to help me. I said slowly, persuasively, as if the thought had just occurred to me, "Let me ride a horse for you . . . one of your own, if the owners won't have me . . . and see for yourself if Kemp-Lore tries to give it sugar. Perhaps you could stick with the horse yourself, and if he comes up with his sugar lumps, maybe you could manage to knock them out of his hand. You might pick them up and put them in your pocket, and give the horse some sugar lumps of your own instead? Then we would see how the horse runs."

He said, "That's fantastic. I can't do things like that."

"It's simple," I said mildly. "You've only to bump his arm."

"No," he said, but not obstinately. A hopeful no, to my ears.

I went on, "Aren't you friendly with that man who arranges the regular dope tests at the races?" One or two spot checks were made at every meeting, mainly to deter trainers of doubtful reputation from pepping up or slowing down their horses with drugs. At the beginning of each afternoon the stewards decided which horses to test—for example, the winner of the second race, or the favourite in the fourth race. No one knew in advance which horses would have their saliva taken.

James followed my thoughts. "You mean, will I ask him if any of the horses you have ridden since your fall have been tested for dope in the normal course of events?"

"Yes," I agreed. "Could you possibly do that?"

"Yes," he said. "I will ring him up. But if any of them have been tested and proved negative, you do realize that it will dispose of your wild accusations absolutely?"

"I do," I agreed. "Actually, I've ridden so many beaten favourites that I can't think why such systematic doping has not already been discovered."

"You really do believe it, don't you?" said James, wonderingly.

"Yes," I said, getting up. "And so will you, James."

I left him staring frozen-faced out of the window, the incredible nature of what I had said to him still losing the battle against his own personal knowledge of Kemp-Lore. James liked the man.

CHAPTER IX

LATE THAT Monday evening James rang me up at my digs and told me that I could ride his own horse, Turniptop, in the novice chase at Stratford-on-Avon on the following Thursday. "I'm doing you no favour," he went on. "He won't win. He's never been over fences, only hurdles, and all I want is for you to give him an easy race round, getting used to the bigger obstacles. All right?"

"All right," I said. There was no mention of whether he would or would not contemplate juggling with sugar lumps.

On Tuesday, I appropriated the Mini-Cooper to make a call at Peter

Cloony's. His wife opened the door to me. She no longer looked rosily content, but thin and wispy. "Come in," she said, "but Peter isn't here. He was given a lift to Birmingham races . . . perhaps he'll get a spare ride. . . ."

"Of course he will," I said. "He's a good jockey."

"The trainers don't seem to think so," she said despairingly. "Ever since he lost his regular job, he's barely had one ride a week. We can't live on it. If things don't change very soon, he's going to give up racing and try something else. But it will break his heart."

The room was cold—too cold for the baby I saw huddled under blankets, asleep in a cot placed where the television had stood when I first visited there. She insisted on making us a cup of tea, and I had to wait before asking her what I really wanted to know.

I said, "That Jaguar—the one which blocked the lane and made Peter late—who did it belong to?"

"We don't know," she said. "It was very odd. No one came to move it away and it stayed across the lane all that morning. In the end the police arranged for it to be towed away."

"You don't happen to know where the Jaguar is now?" I asked.

"It used to be outside the big garage beside Timberley station."

I thanked her and stood up, and took a sealed envelope out of my pocket and gave it to her. "This is a present for the baby. There's likely to be a lot of cold weather coming, so you must promise to spend most of it on keeping warm."

"I promise," she said faintly.

The battered, elderly Jaguar was where she had said. I went into the garage to ask if I could buy it.

"Sorry, sir, no can do," the man in charge said breezily. "I can't sell it to you because I don't know who it belongs to."

With a bit of prompting he told me all about the Jaguar's being stuck across the lane and how his firm had fetched it.

I said, "But someone must have seen the driver after he left the car?"

"No. The police think he must have got a lift, and then decided the car wasn't worth coming back for."

I left the garage and decided to try the railway station. The one tremendous disadvantage Kemp-Lore had to overcome, I thought, was

his own fame. His face was so well known that he could not hope to move about the country inconspicuously, and it should be possible to find someone who had seen him.

But there was nothing to learn from the elderly stationmaster. Maurice Kemp-Lore had never (more's the pity, he said) caught a train at Timberley. Most certainly not the midday train. Passengers for that train were always ladies going shopping in Cheltenham. "Bit of a joke it is round here, see, the midday."

I gave him a hot tip for Birmingham that afternoon and left.

Timberley village pub had never been stirred, they told me regretfully, by the flashing presence of Maurice Kemp-Lore. None of the garages within ten miles had ever seen him. The local taxi service had never driven him.

If I hadn't been so utterly sure that it was Kemp-Lore who had abandoned the Jaguar, I would have admitted that if no one had seen him he hadn't been there.

The army tank carrier that had blocked Peter's and my way the first time was there accidentally. But a weapon was put straight into the hand of Peter's enemy. He had only had to make Peter late again, and to spread his little rumours, and the deed was done. No confidence, no rides, no career for Cloony.

I still hoped by perseverance to dig something up, so I booked a room in a hotel in Cheltenham, and the next morning I went down to the Cheltenham railway station and found the man who had collected the tickets from the passengers on the twelve-thirty train from Timberley on the day the Jaguar was abandoned. He too had never seen Kemp-Lore, except on television; but he hesitated and said, "Though I think I've seen his sister."

"What was she like?" I asked.

"Very like him, of course, sir, or I wouldn't have known who she was. And she had on riding clothes. You know—jodhpurs. And a scarf over her head. Pretty, she looked. I couldn't think who she was for a bit, and then it came to me. When was it? Ah, some time before Christmas, I'd say."

He expertly slipped the pound I gave him into an inner pocket. "Thank you, sir, thank you indeed," he said.

ON THURSDAY James was so busy with his other runners that I did not exchange more than a few words with him during the first part of the afternoon. When I went out into the parade ring to join him for Turniptop's race, he was standing alone. "Maurice Kemp-Lore's here," he said abruptly.

"Yes, I know," I said. "I saw him."

"He has given sugar to several horses already."

"What?" I exclaimed.

"I have asked quite a few people . . . Maurice has been feeding sugar to any number of horses during the past few weeks, not only to the ones you have ridden. None of the horses you rode were picked for the regulation dope test, but some of the other horses Maurice gave sugar to were tested. All negative."

"He only gave doped sugar to my mounts. The rest were camouflage," I said. It sounded improbable, but I was sure of it.

James shook his head.

"Did Kemp-Lore try to give Turniptop any sugar?"

But before James could answer, one of the stewards came over to talk to him, and then it was time to mount and go out for the race.

I knew by the second fence that Turniptop was not doped. He leaped and surged and I could have shouted aloud with relief. He was eager. He was rash. And my mood matched his exactly. We infected each other with recklessness. We took some indefensible risks and we got away with them.

I began to be afraid we would win. Afraid, because I knew James wanted to sell the horse, and if he had already won a novice chase he would not be as valuable as if he had not. It would disqualify him from entering a string of good novice chases in the following season. It would be far, far better, I knew, to come second.

Coming into the second to the last fence, there was only one other tiring horse alongside, and the disaster of winning seemed unavoidable. Turniptop rose, or rather, fell, to the occasion. In spite of my urging him to put in another stride, he took off far too soon and landed with his hind feet tangled hopelessly in the birch fence. His forelegs buckled and he went down on to his knees, with my hands round his throat. Even then his indomitable sense of balance rescued him, and

he staggered back on to his feet, tipping me back into the saddle, and tossing his head as if in disgust, he set off again towards the winning post. The horse which had been alongside was now safely ahead, and two that had been behind me had jumped past, so that we came to the last fence in fourth position.

I had lost my irons and couldn't get my feet into them again in time to jump, so we went over the last with them dangling in the air. I collected him together and squeezed my legs, and Turniptop, game to the end, accelerated past two horses and flashed into second place four strides from the post.

James waited for me to dismount in the unsaddling enclosure. "Don't ever ride a race like that for me again," he said. His eyes gleamed, narrowed and inscrutable. "You proved your point. But you could have killed my horse doing it." He gave me a hard stare. "You'd better come up to the stable this evening," he said. "We can't talk here. There are too many people about."

So I had to weigh in, still without knowing exactly what had happened in the saddling box before the race.

James was waiting for me in the office. He got up and poured drinks when I came in. His strong heavy face looked worried. "I apologize," he said abruptly. "I very nearly let Maurice give Turniptop that damned sugar."

"What happened in the saddling box?" I asked.

He took a sip from his glass. "I gave Sid instructions that no one, absolutely no one, was to give Turniptop anything to eat or drink before the race. When I reached the box with your saddle, Maurice was in the box next door and I watched him giving the horse there some sugar. Sid said no one had given Turniptop anything. I put on your saddle, and began to do up the girths. Maurice came round from the next box and said hallo. That infectious smile of his . . . I found myself thinking you were mad. He was wheezing a bit with asthma . . . and he put his hand in his pocket and brought out three lumps of sugar. He did it naturally, casually, and held them out to Turniptop. I had my hands full of girths and I thought you were wrong . . . but . . . I don't know . . . there was something in the way he was standing.



People who are fond of horses stroke them when they give them sugar, they don't stand as far away as possible. Anyway, I did decide suddenly that there would be no harm done if Turniptop didn't eat that sugar, so I dropped the girths and pretended to trip, and grabbed Maurice's arm. The sugar fell on to the straw and I stepped on it as if by accident while I was recovering my balance."

"What did he say?" I asked, fascinated.

"Just for a second he looked absolutely furious. Then he smiled again, and . . ." James's eyes glinted ". . . he said how much he admired me for giving poor Finn this one last chance."

"Dear of him," I said.

"I told him it wasn't exactly your last chance. I said you would be riding Template on Saturday as well. He just said 'Oh really?' and wished me luck and walked away."

"So the sugar was crunched up and swept out with the dirty straw," I said. "Nothing to analyse? No evidence?" A nuisance.

"If I hadn't stepped on it, Maurice could have picked it up and offered it to Turniptop again. I hadn't taken any sugar with me to substitute . . . I didn't believe I would need it."

He hadn't intended to bother, I knew. But he had bothered. I would never stop feeling grateful. James said, "Why? I don't understand why he should have gone to such lengths. What has he got against you?"

"I am a jockey, and he is not," I said flatly. "That's all. It's no coincidence that you and most other trainers have had trouble finding

and keeping a jockey. You've all been swayed by Kemp-Lore, either by him directly, or through those two shadows of his, Ballerton and Corin Kellar, who soak up his poison like sponges and drip it out into every receptive ear. They've said it all to you. You repeated it to me yourself, not so long ago. Peter Cloony is always late, Tick-Tock doesn't try, Danny Higgs bets too heavily, Grant sold information, Finn has lost his nerve You believed it all, James, didn't you? It doesn't take much for an owner or a trainer to lose confidence in a jockey. Art killed himself because Corin sacked him. Grant had a mental breakdown. Peter Cloony is stony broke. Tick-Tock makes jokes like Pagliacci And I haven't exactly enjoyed the last three weeks myself."

"No," he said. "No, I don't suppose you have."

"It's been so calculated, this destruction of jockeys," I said. "When he had me on the programme he introduced me as an unsuccessful rider, and he meant me to stay that way."

James said firmly, "It's a matter for the Hunt Committee."

"No," I said. "His father's a member. Besides, the whole committee's a stronghold of pro-Kemp-Lore feeling and there aren't any facts yet that he couldn't explain away. But I'm digging. The day will come."

"You sound unexpectedly cheerful," he said.

I stood up abruptly. "James, I wanted to kill myself last week. I'm glad I didn't. It makes me cheerful."

He looked so startled that I laughed. "Never mind," I said, "but you must understand I don't think the National Hunt Committee meets the case at the moment. Too gentlemanly. I favour something stronger for dear Maurice." But I had as yet no useful plan, and dear Maurice still had his teeth; and they were sharp.

CHAPTER X

ALTHOUGH NEITHER Tick-Tock nor I had any rides the next day, I pinched the car to go to the meeting at Ascot, and walked round the course to get the feel of the turf. The ground was hard with a touch of frost in the more exposed patches. I finished the circuit, planning the race in my mind as I went. If the ground remained firm it would be a fast run affair, but that suited Template well.

Outside the weighing-room Peter Cloony stopped me.

"I'll pay you back," he said, almost belligerently. "We don't need charity."

I told him that he was a fool, that he should cheer up, and perhaps what I had given his wife would help him forget his worries and get his mind back on racing.

I walked off, leaving him looking surprised. What Kemp-Lore had pulled down, I could try to rebuild, I thought.

In the weighing-room after the fourth race I was handed a telegram. It said: PICK ME UP WHITE BEAR, UXBRIDGE, 6.30 P.M. IMPORTANT. INGERSOLL.

I cursed Tick-Tock soundly because Uxbridge was in the opposite direction from home. But the car was half his, after all, and I'd had more than my fair share of it during the past week, so I followed his instructions.

Mine was only the second car in the dark car park beside the White Bear. The bar held only a droopy-moustached old man pursing his lips to the evening's first half-pint.

I ordered a whisky. No Tick-Tock. I looked at my watch. Twenty to seven.

"Are you by any chance Mr. Finn?" the barman asked.

I said I was.

"Then I've a message for you, sir. A Mr. Ingersoll telephoned and said he couldn't get here to meet you but could you pick him up at the railway station at six fifty-five."

Finishing my drink, I thanked the barman and went out to the car. I climbed into the driving seat and stretched my hand out to turn on the lights.

I stretched out my hand . . . but I didn't reach the lights. My neck was gripped violently from behind.

I flung up my hands and clawed but I couldn't reach the face of whoever was behind me, and my nails were useless against his thick leather gloves. The fingers were strong, and what was worse, they knew exactly where to press, each side of the neck, just above the collar-bone, where the carotid arteries branched upward.

I hadn't a chance. In a few seconds a roaring blackness took me off.

I COULDN'T have been out very long, but it was long enough. When consciousness slowly returned, I found I could open neither my eyes nor my mouth. Both were covered with adhesive tape. My wrists were tied together, and my ankles, when I tried to move them, would only part a foot or two: they were hobbled together.

I was lying on my side on the floor in the back of a car which, from the size and smell and feel, I knew to be the Mini-Cooper. I was very cold and I realized that I was no longer wearing either a jacket or an overcoat.

My arms were dragged forward between the two front seats so that I couldn't reach the tape to rip it off. Though I couldn't see who was driving, I didn't need to. There was only one person in the world who could have set such a trap, only one person who had any reason, however mad, to abduct me. Maurice Kemp-Lore did not intend that I should win the Midwinter Cup.

Did he know, I wondered helplessly, that it was no accident that Turniptop had not eaten the doped sugar? Did he guess that I knew all about his anti-jockey activities?

After some time, the car swung suddenly to the left and bumped on to an unevenly surfaced side road. Soon it rolled to a stop. Kemp-Lore got out, tipped forward the driver's seat, and tugged me out after him by the wrists.

I couldn't get my feet under me because of the hobble, and I fell on my back. The ground was hard and gravelled. He pulled me to my feet, and I stood there swaying. He had some sort of lead fixed to my tied wrists, and he began to pull me forward by it. The ground was uneven and the rope joining my ankles was very short. I kept stumbling, and then I fell. He dragged me along the ground on my back for a long way.

At length he paused and let me stand up again. He still didn't speak. There was the sound of a door being opened, and I was tugged on. There was a step up, as I realized a fraction too late to prevent myself falling again. It knocked the wind out of me.

It was a wooden floor, and smelt strongly of dust and faintly of horses. He pulled me to my feet again and I felt my wrists being hauled upward and fastened to something just above my head. When he had

finished and stepped away I explored with my fingers to find out what it was; and as soon as I felt the smooth metal hooks, I knew exactly the sort of place I was in.

It was a tack-room, the place where saddles and bridles are kept, with the brushes and bandages and rugs that horses need. From the ceiling of every tack-room hangs a harness hook, a gadget something like a three-pronged anchor, which is used for hanging bridles on while they are being cleaned. There were no bridles hanging from these particular hooks. Only me.

This tack-room was very cold. There were no horses moving in the stalls. The silence took on a new meaning. It was an empty stable. I shivered from something more than cold.

I heard him step out into the gritty yard, and presently there was the sound of a tap being turned on and water splashing into a bucket. Oh no, I thought, oh no, I'm so cold already.

He turned off the tap and came back across the yard into the tack-room and stopped behind me, wheezing faintly. The handle of the bucket clanked. I took a deep breath, and waited.

He threw the water. It hit me squarely between the shoulder blades and soaked me from head to foot. It was bitterly, icy cold, and it stung the skinned patches on my back like murder.

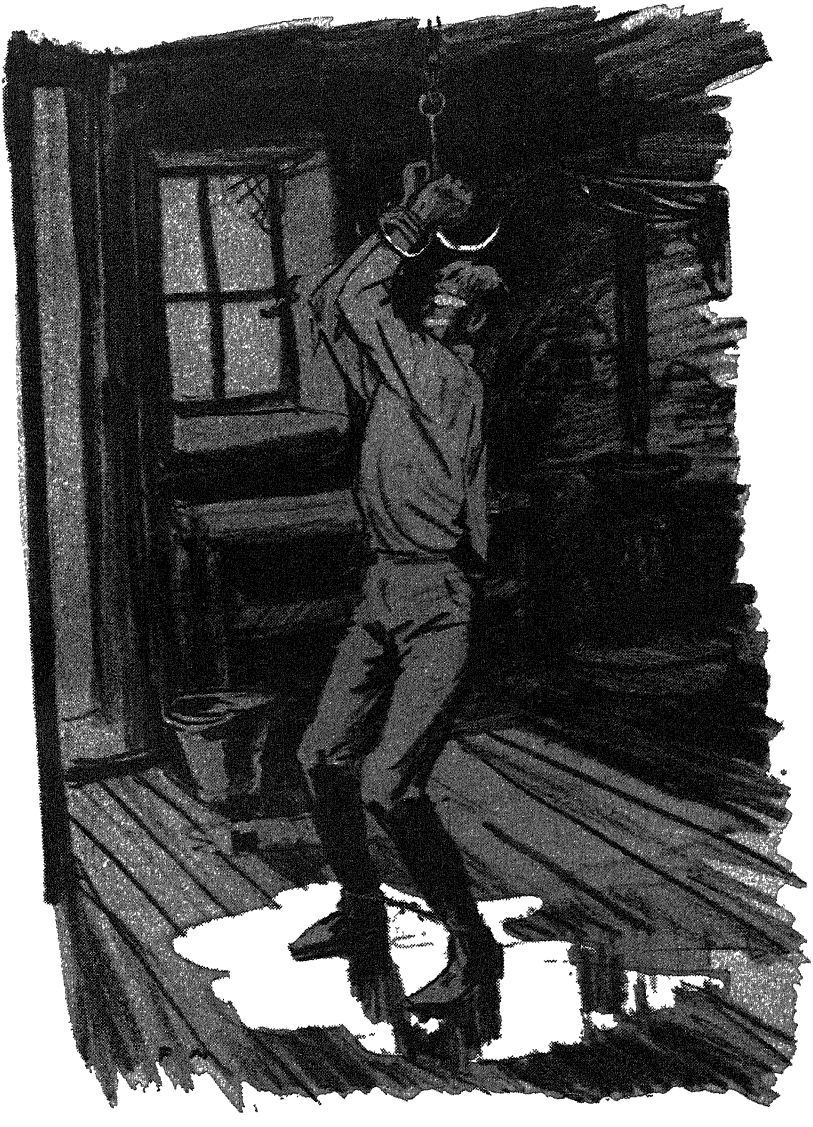
After a short pause he went across the yard again and refilled the bucket. You can't be wetter than wet, I thought, and you can't be colder than freezing.

He came back with the bucket, and this time he threw the whole arctic bucketful in my face. My chest hurt and I couldn't get my breath. He was standing close beside me now. His asthma was worse. He pulled my head back by the hair and spoke for the first time. "That should fix *you*," he said in a low unrecognizable voice.

He let go of my hair and went out. I heard him walk away across the yard and after a while the Mini-Cooper's engine started, the car drove off, and soon I could hear it no more.

One thing was clear, he wouldn't be back for hours, because it was Friday. From eight o'clock until at least nine thirty he would be occupied with his programme.

The first necessity was to get the adhesive tape off my eyes and



mouth. After a good deal of rubbing my mouth against my arm, I only succeeded in peeling back one corner of it—enough to let in a precious extra trickle of air, but no good for shouting for help.

My wet trousers clung clammily to my legs, my shoes were full of water. Already my fingers were completely numb, and my feet were going through the stage that precedes loss of feeling.

Harness hooks. I considered their anatomy. A stem with three upward-curving branches at the bottom. At the top a ring, and attached to the ring, a chain. At the top of the chain, a staple driven firmly into a beam.

Somewhere, I thought, there must be a weak link. Literally a weak link. When they were bought, harness hooks didn't have chains on. Chain was cut to the length needed and added when the hook was installed in the tack-room. Therefore, somewhere there was a joining link.

The bottom curve of the hooks brushed my hair, and my wrists were tied some three inches above that. It gave me very little leverage, but it was the only hope I had. I started pivoting, leaning my forearms on the hooks and twisting the chain. In two and a half full turns, as near as I could judge, it locked solid. If I could turn it further, the weak link would snap.

The theory was simple. Putting it into operation was different. Twisting the chain, I pressed round as hard as I could. Nothing happened. I unwound the chain a fraction, and jerked it tight again. The jolt ran right down my body and threw me off my feet. I stumbled miserably upright again, and did it again. The chain didn't break.

After that I got back to work on the adhesive tape and finally dislodged it entirely from my mouth. It meant that now I could open my mouth and yell.

I yelled—but no one came. My voice echoed round the tack-room. I shouted, on and off, for a long while. No results.

It was at this point, perhaps an hour after Kemp-Lore had gone, that I became both very frightened and very angry. The dismal fact had to be faced that if I had to stay where I was all night my hands, which I could no longer feel, might be dead in the morning. Dead. Gangrenous.

Being angry gave me both strength and resolution. I wound the

chain up tight again and jerked. It took my breath away. I loosened and jerked, loosened and jerked, pushing against the hooks, trying to twist them round with all my strength. The chain rattled, and held. I started doing it rhythmically. Six jerks and a rest, six jerks and a rest, until I was sobbing.

Six jerks and a rest. Six jerks and a rest. The rests got longer. Time passed. I became giddy as I grew tired. Why—jerk—wouldn't—jerk—the ruddy chain—jerk—jerk—break.

I was quite unprepared for it when it happened. One minute I was screwing up the dregs of willpower for another series of jerks, and the next, after a convulsive, despairing heave, I was collapsing in a tumbled heap on the floor with the harness hook clattering down on top of me, still tied to my wrists.

But after a moment or two, when my head had cleared, I rolled into a kneeling position so that the blood was flowing down my arms at last, and put my hands between my thighs to try to warm them. The relief of having my arms down made me forget how cold I was, and how wet. I felt almost cheerful, as if I had won a major battle; and indeed, looking back on it, I know I had.

KNEELING VERY soon became uncomfortable, so I shuffled across the floor until I came to a wall, and sat with the bottom of my spine propped against it and my knees bent up.

The adhesive tape on my eyes was still stuck tight. I tried to scrape it off by rubbing it against the rope on my wrists but the hooks hindered me, and in the end I gave up and concentrated again on warming my hands, alternately cradling them between my thighs and thumping them against my knees to restore the circulation.

After a time I found I could move my fingers. I still couldn't feel them at all, but movement was a tremendous step forward. I put my hands up to my face and tried to scrape the tape off with my thumbnail, but my thumb bent uselessly. I put my right thumb in my mouth, to warm it. Every few minutes I tested the results on the edge of the tape. Eventually, my nail had pushed a flap unstuck which was big enough for me to grip between my wrists, and I finally managed to pull the tape off.

Dazzling moonlight poured through the open door. I stretched out my bound feet. My fingers wouldn't undo the knots. My pockets had been emptied; no knife, no matches. There was nothing in the tack-room to cut with. I stood up stiffly, leaning against the wall, and slowly, carefully, shuffled over to the door.

I looked round the moonlit yard. There, beside the tap, was an object I was very glad to see. A boot scraper, a thin metal plate bedded in concrete. With small careful steps I made my way to it.

Leaning against the wall, and with one foot on the ground, I stretched the rope tautly over the boot scraper and began to rub it to and fro, using the other foot as a pendulum. It took a long time to fray through the rope, but it parted in the end. I knelt down and tried to do the same with the strands round my wrists, but the harness hook kept getting in the way. I stood up wearily. It looked as though I'd have to lug that tiresome piece of ironmongery round with me a while longer.

Being able to move my legs, however, gave me a marvellous sense of freedom. Stiffly, shaking with cold, I walked out of the yard round to the house. There were no lights and the downstairs windows were all shuttered. It was as empty as the stable. I continued on down the long drive.

A lane ran past the end of the drive giving no indication as to which way lay civilization. Since it had to be one thing or the other, I turned right. Aching all over, I stumbled on, hanging on to the fact that if I went far enough I was bound to come to a house.

What I came to first was not a house but something much better. A telephone box. I could call the police, but that would mean unending questions, and like as not I'd end up in the hospital.

They would be racing at Ascot the next day. Template would turn up for the Midwinter, and James didn't know his jockey was wandering round unfit to ride. Unfit . . . I came to the conclusion that the only satisfactory way to cheat Kemp-Lore of his victory was to go and ride the race, and win it if I could, and pretend that tonight's misfortunes had not happened. He was not, I vowed, going to get the better of me any more.

I dialled O with an effort, gave the operator my telephone credit-card

number, and asked to be connected to the one person in the world who would give me the help I needed.

Joanna's voice sounded sleepy. She said, "Is that you, Rob?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, go back to bed and ring me in the morning," she said.

"Please don't ring off, Joanna," I said urgently. "I need help."

"What's the matter?" I heard her yawn.

"I . . . I . . . Joanna, come and help me. Please."

There was a little silence and she said in a more awake voice, "Where are you, Rob?"

"I don't really know," I said despairingly. "I'm in a telephone box on a country road miles from anywhere. The telephone exchange is Hampden Row." I spelt it out for her. "I don't think it's very far from London, but I can't make it on my own. I've no money and my clothes are wet."

"Oh." A pause. "All right, then. I'll find out where you are and come in a taxi. Anything else?"

"Bring a sweater," I said. "Some dry socks, if you have any, some gloves and a pair of scissors."

"O.K. I'll come as soon as I can."

I fumbled the receiver back on to its rest. However quick she was, she wouldn't arrive for an hour.

I sat down on the floor of the box and leaned gingerly against the wall. There was a good deal to think about to take my mind off my woes. That adhesive tape for instance. What would have happened I wondered, if I had been able to see and talk? The strip over my mouth had been to stop me shouting for help. But what did it matter if I could see? I would have seen Kemp-Lore . . . that was it! It was himself he had not wanted me to see. He must have believed I did not know who had abducted me. Which meant that he thought James had knocked Turniptop's doped sugar out of his hand by accident, that he hadn't heard about Tick-Tock and me going round to all the stables. It gave me, I thought, a fractional advantage for the future. If he didn't know he was due for destruction himself, he would not be excessively on his guard.

Looking at my bloodless hands and knowing that on top of

everything else I still had to face the pain of their return to life, I was aware that all the civilized brakes were off my conscience. Helping to build up what he had broken was not enough. He himself had hammered into me the implacability I had lacked, to avenge myself and all the others, thoroughly and without compunction.

SHE CAME, in the end. I heard a car draw up, and her quick tread on the road. The door of the telephone box opened, letting in an icy blast, and there she was, dressed in slacks and a warm jacket, with the light falling on her dark hair and making hollows of her eyes.

I did my best at a big smile of welcome, but it didn't come off very well. I was shivering too much. She knelt down and took a closer look at me. "Your hands," she said; her face went stiff with shock. She opened her handbag, took out a pair of scissors and cut me free. She carefully peeled the cut pieces of rope from my wrists, exposing big raw patches, dark and deep.

There was a step on the road outside and a big sturdy man's shape loomed up behind Joanna. "Are you all right, miss?" he said.

"Yes, thank you."

He looked at my wrists and hands. "Crikey. You've been done proper, haven't you?" he said.

"Proper," I agreed.

He smiled faintly. "Come on then. No sense in hanging about here." He and Joanna helped me to the cab.

The driver held the door open. "We'd better take him to a doctor," he said. "That's frostbite."

"No," I said. "No doctor. Just cold. Not frostbite."

"What happened to your back?" asked the driver, looking at the tattered bits of shirt sticking to me

"I . . . fell," I said. "On some gravel."

"There's a lot of dirt in it," said Joanna, sounding worried.

"You wash it," I said. "I need antiseptic, aspirins and sleep."

"I hope you know what you're doing," said Joanna. She looked at me judiciously, and out came the scissors. Some quick snips and the ruins of my shirt lay on the seat beside me. She cut two long strips of it and wound them carefully round my wrists. She then helped my

arms into the clothes she had brought, and a pair of mittens. There was a thermos flask of hot soup too. Joanna held a cup of it to my mouth.

The driver started up and Joanna asked, "Who did it?"

"Tell you later."

"All right." She brought out some fleecy slippers and thick socks from her suit-case and got down on her knees on the floor of the cab and changed my wet socks and shoes. My arms and shoulders ached unceasingly and if I leaned back the raw bits didn't like it. After a while I slipped to the floor and finished the journey sitting there with my head and my hands in Joanna's lap.

WHEN WE finally got back to Joanna's warm room I sat with my elbows on my knees, watching my fingers gradually change colour from yellowy white to smudgy charcoal, to patchy purple, and finally to red. Joanna had dug out some aspirins, then she made some black coffee and held it for me to drink. It was stiff with brandy.

It was then that my fingers began to tingle. The tingle increased first to a burning sensation and then to a feeling of being agonizingly squeezed in a vice. When the pulse got going, it felt as though my hands had been taken out of the vice, laid on a bench, and were being rhythmically hammered.

When I looked up Joanna was watching, blinking to disguise the tears in her eyes. "Is it over?" she said.

"More or less."

"I'd better wash those scratches on your back."

"In the morning," I said. "A few more hours won't hurt. I've had four anti-tetanus injections in the last two years, and there's always penicillin . . . and I'm too tired."

She didn't argue but helped me get into her bed. There was still a dent in her pillow where her head had been. I put mine there too, with an odd feeling of delight.

She bent down to kiss me good night on the forehead. I couldn't help it; I pulled her down and kissed her. For a moment she seemed to kiss me back, but it was so brief and passing that I thought I had imagined it.

She stood up abruptly, her face scrubbed of any emotion. She turned away without speaking and went across the room to the sofa, where she twisted a blanket round herself and lay down. She stretched out her hand to the table light and switched it off.

Her voice reached me across the dark room, calm, self-controlled. "Good night, Rob."

"Good night, Joanna," I said politely.

I rolled over on to my stomach and put my face in her pillow.

CHAPTER XI

SOME TIME after it was light I heard Joanna go into the kitchen where she made some fresh coffee. Saturday morning, I thought. Midwinter Cup day. I turned over slowly on to one side, shutting my eyes against the stiffness which afflicted every muscle.

She came across the room with a mug of steaming coffee and put it on the bedside table. Her face was pale and expressionless.

"How do you feel?" she asked, a little too clinically.

"Alive," I said.

She sat down again on the edge of the bed. I shoved myself up into a sitting position, and brought a hand out from under the bedclothes to reach for the coffee.

As a hand it closely resembled a bunch of sausages.

"Blast," I said. "What's the time?"

"About eight o'clock," she said. "Why?"

Eight o'clock. The race was at two thirty. I began counting backward. I would have to be at Ascot by, at the latest, one thirty, and the journey down would take about fifty minutes. Allow an hour for hold-ups. That left me precisely four and a half hours in which to get fit enough to ride, and, the way I felt, it was a tall order.

"What's the matter?" asked Joanna.

I told her.

"You aren't seriously thinking of racing today?" she said.

"I am riding Template in the Midwinter Cup," I said. And I told her why. I told her everything, all about Kemp-Lore's anti-jockey obsession and all that had happened the previous evening.

When I had finished she looked at me without speaking for half a minute and then she cleared her throat and said, "Yes, I see. We'd better get you fit, then. What first?"

"Hot bath and breakfast," I said.

Joanna said, "Are you absolutely determined to go?"

"Absolutely."

"Well . . . I'd better tell you . . . I watched 'Turf Talk' last night on television. I sometimes do, since you were on it."

"And?"

"Kemp-Lore talked about the Midwinter Cup—biographies of the horses and trainers, and so on. I was waiting to hear him mention you, but he didn't. He just went on about how superb Template is. But what I thought you'd like to know is that he said he personally would be there today, and that he personally would interview the winning jockey. If only you can win, he'll have to describe you doing it, which would be a bitter enough pill, and then congratulate you publicly in full view of several million people."

I gazed at her, awestruck. "That's a great thought," I said.

I pushed back the bedclothes. "I'd better get going," I said. "What do you have in the way of antiseptic and bandages?"

"Not much," she said apologetically. "But there's a chemist two streets away. I'll stop at your family's, too, and pick up a shirt and jacket."

She left and I got out of bed and went into the bathroom. Gradually the heat of the bath did its work until I could rotate my shoulders and turn my head from side to side without feeling that I was tearing something adrift.

She had pressed my trousers. I put them on and when Joanna came back she dressed my wounds. She was neat and quick, and her touch was light.

"Most of the dirt came out in the bath," she observed, busy with adhesive tape and scissors. "You've got quite an impressive set of muscles, haven't you? You must be very strong." She slowly unwound the bloodstained bandages on my wrists. What lay underneath was a pretty disturbing sight. "I can't deal with this," she said positively. "You must go to a doctor."

"This evening," I said. "Put some more bandages on, for now."

"It's too deep," she said. "It's too easy to get it infected. You can't ride like this, Rob, really you can't."

"I can," I said. "I'll dunk them in antiseptic for a while, then you wrap them up again. Nice and flat, so they won't show."

She sighed, but did as I asked. When she had finished, the white cuffs looked tidy and narrow, and I knew they would be unnoticeable under racing colours.

The pity about hot baths is that, although they loosen one up beautifully for the time being, the effect does not last; one has to consolidate the position by exercise. I did a few rather half-hearted bend-stretch arm movements while Joanna scrambled us some eggs, and after we had eaten and I had shaved I went back to it with more resolution, knowing that if I didn't get on to Template's back in a reasonably supple condition he had no chance of winning. It wouldn't help anyone if I fell off at the first fence.

After an hour's work I got to the stage where I could lift my arms above shoulder height without wanting to cry out. And after another hour of it I had loosened up from head to foot, with hardly a muscle that wasn't moving reasonably freely.

Joanna had already told me that she would not come to Ascot with me, but would watch on television. "And mind you win," she said, "after all this."

"Can I come back to your place, afterwards?" I said.

"Why, yes . . . yes," she said, as if surprised that I had asked.

"Fine," I said. "Well . . . good-bye."

"Good luck, Rob," she said seriously.

CHAPTER XII

BEFORE STARTING for Ascot I had the taxi stop at a shop and I bought a pair of gloves. As we proceeded I kept the warmth and flexibility going in my arms by some minor exercises and imaginary piano playing.

The driver announced, when I paid him, that he thought he would stay and have a flutter on the races himself, so I arranged for him to

drive me back to London again at the end of the afternoon. "Got any tips?" he said, counting my change.

"How about Template, in the big race?" I said.

"I dunno." He frowned. "They say Finn's all washed up."

"Don't believe all you hear," I said, smiling. "See you later."

I went along to the weighing-room. The hands of the clock on the tower pointed to five past one. Sid, James's head travelling lad, was standing outside the weighing-room door when I got there, and he came to meet me, and said, "You're here, then."

"Yes," I said. "Why not?"

"The guvnor posted me here to wait for you. There's a rumour going round that you weren't going to turn up, see?" He bustled off.

I went through the weighing-room into the changing-room.

"So you came after all," said Peter Cloony.

Tick-Tock said, "Where the hell have you been?"

"Why did everyone believe I wouldn't get here?" I asked.

"I don't know. Some rumour or other. Everyone's been saying you frightened yourself again on Thursday and you'd chucked up the idea of riding any more. I rang your pad this morning, but they said you hadn't been back all night. I wanted to see if it was O.K. for me to have the car after racing today."

"The car?" I said. "Oh . . . yes. Certainly. Meet me outside the weighing-room after the last race, and I'll show you where it is."

"I say, are you all right? You look a bit night-afterish."

"Of course I'm all right."

"Well, the best of luck on Template, and all that rot."

An official called me out of the changing-room. James was waiting in the weighing-room. He looked relieved. "I was sure you wouldn't have stayed away without at least letting me know."

"Of course not," I said. Not unless, I thought, I had still been hanging in a deserted tack-room, being crippled for life.

"There's a touch of frost in the ground still," he said, "but that's really to our advantage." I could see that for once he was excited.

When I went back into the changing-room to put on colours, I decided to use the wash-room. I wanted to change out of sight, so that no one would see the bandages.

The first race was over and the jockeys were beginning to stream in when I went back to my peg. I took my saddle and weight cloth along to the scales to weigh out, and gave my saddle to Sid, who was standing there waiting for it.

He said, "The guvnor says I'm to saddle Template in the stable, and bring him straight down into the parade ring when it's time, and not go into the saddling boxes at all."

"Good," I said emphatically. Evidently James was keeping his word that Template would have no chance to be doped.

The time dragged. The second race was run with me still sitting in the changing-room. I flexed my fingers. Most of the swelling had gone, and they seemed to be getting fairly strong again.

Back came the other jockeys and I felt apart from it all, as if I were living in a different dimension. Another slow quarter of an hour crawled by. Then an official put his head in and shouted, "Jockeys out, hurry up there, please."

I fastened my helmet, picked up my whip, and followed the general drift to the door.

Down in the paddock stood cold little bunches of owners and trainers, most of them muffled to the eyes against the wind. Lord Tirrold and James both wore on their faces the same look of excitement. "Well, Rob," said Lord Tirrold, "this is it."

"Yes, sir," I agreed, "this is it."

"What do you think of Emerald?" he asked.

We watched the new Irish mare who had come over with a terrific reputation shamble round the parade ring with the sloppy walk and the low-carried head that so often denotes a champion.

"They say she's another Kerstin," said James, referring to the best steeplechasing mare of the century.

"Template will beat her," said Lord Tirrold.

"I think so," James agreed.

I swallowed. They were too sure. Their very confidence weakened mine. A bell rang: time for the jockeys to mount. The boy brought Template across to us and took off his rug. Template's eyes were liquid, clear, his muscles quivering to be off; the picture of a taut, tuned racing machine eager to get on with the job he was born for.

James gave me a leg up into the saddle and I gathered the reins and put my feet into the irons. What he read in my face I don't know, but he said suddenly, anxiously, "Is anything wrong?"

"Everything's fine," I said. I smiled, reassuring myself as much as him. I touched my cap to Lord Tirrold and turned Template to take his place in the parade down the course.

There was a television camera on a tower not far down the course from the starting gate, and I found the thought of Kemp-Lore raging at the sight of me on his monitor set a most effective antidote to the freezing wind.

"Line up," called the starter, and we straightened into a row across the course, with Template on the inside, hugging the rails.

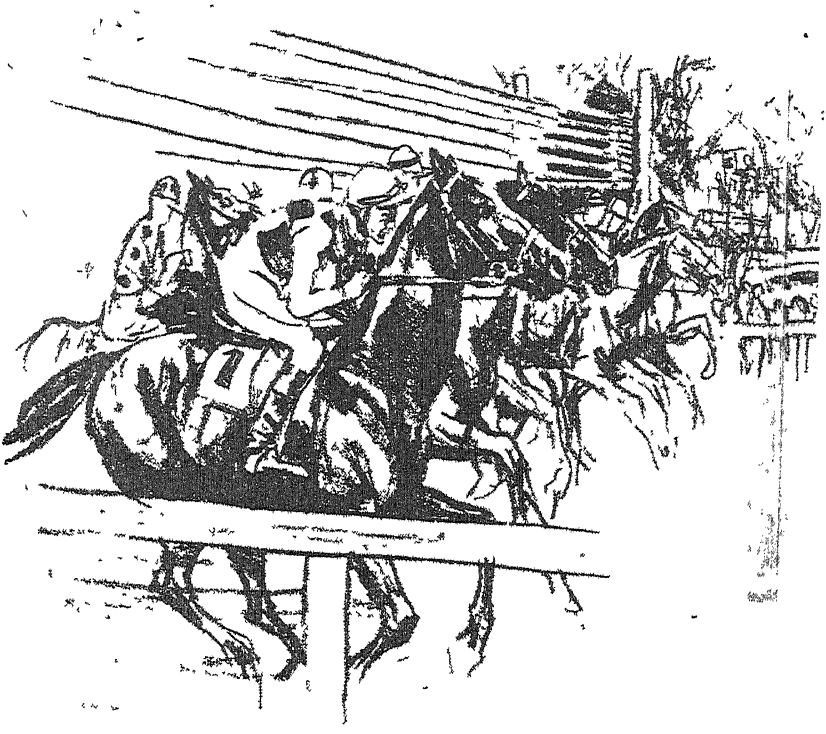
I watched the starter's hand. He had a habit of stretching his fingers just before he pulled the lever to let the tapes up. He stretched his fingers. I kicked Template's flanks. He was moving quite fast when we went under the rising tapes, with me lying flat along his withers to avoid being swept off. We were away, securely on the rails and on the inside curve for at least the next two miles.

The first three fences were the worst, as far as my comfort was concerned. By the time we had jumped the fourth—the water—I had felt the thinly healed crusts on my back tear open, had found just how much my wrists and hands had to stand from the tug of the reins. My chief feeling, as we landed over the water, was one of relief. It was all bearable; I could contain it and ignore it.

The pattern of the race was simple, because from the start to finish I saw only three other horses, Emerald and two lightly weighted animals whom I had allowed to go on and set the pace.

My main task was keeping Emerald from cutting across in front of me and being able to take the opening between the front pair and the rails. I left just too little room between me and the front pair for Emerald to get in, forcing the mare to race all the way on my outside. It didn't matter that she was two or three feet in front: I could see her better there.

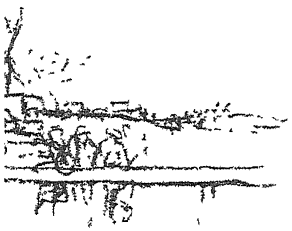
With the order unchanged we completed the whole of the first circuit and swept out to the country again. Template jumped the four fences down to Swinley Bottom so brilliantly that I kept finding myself



crowding the tails of the pacemakers as we landed, and had to ease him back on the flat each time to avoid taking the lead too soon, and yet not ease him so much that Emerald could squeeze into the space between us.

For another half mile the two horses in front kept going splendidly, but one of the jockeys picked up his whip at the third last fence, and the other was already busy with his hands. They were dead ducks, and because of that they swung a little wide going round the last bend into the straight. Emerald's jockey chose that exact moment to go to the front. I saw him spurt forward from beside me and accelerate, but he had to go round on the outside of the two front horses and he was wasting lengths in the process.

After the bend, tackling the straight for the last time, with the second last fence just ahead, Emerald was in the lead on the



outside, then the two tiring horses, then me.

There was a three-foot gap then between the innermost pacemaker and the rails. I squeezed Template. He pricked his ears and bunched his colossal muscles and thrust himself forward into the narrow opening. He took off at the second last fence half a length behind and landed a length in front of the tiring pacemaker. With no check in his stride he sped smoothly on, still hugging the rails, with Emerald only a length in front. I urged him a fraction forward to prevent the mare from swinging over to the rails and blocking me at the last fence. She needed two lengths' lead to do it safely, and I had no intention of letting her have it. As we galloped towards the last fence, Emerald was a length ahead and showing no sign of flagging, but I was still holding Template on a tight rein.

Ten yards from the fence, I let him go, and squeezed with my legs and he went over the birch like an angel, smooth, surging, the nearest to flying one can get.

He gained nearly half a length on the mare, but she didn't give up easily. I sat down and rode Template for my life, and he stretched himself into his flat-looking stride. He came level with Emerald halfway along the run in. She hung on grimly for a short distance, but Template floated past her with an incredible increase of speed, and he won, in the end, by two clear lengths.

There are times beyond words, and that was one of them. I patted Template's sweating neck over and over; how does one thank a horse? How could one ever repay him, in terms he would understand, for giving one such a victory?

Axminster and Lord Tirrold stood side by side, waiting for us in the unsaddling enclosure, the same elated expression on both their faces.

I smiled at them and slid off on to the ground. "Rob," said James, shaking his big head. "Rob."

"I knew he'd do it," Lord Tirrold said. "What a horse! What a race!"

An official came over and asked Lord Tirrold not to go away, as the Cup was to be presented to him in a few minutes. To me he said, "Will you come straight out again after you have weighed in? There's a trophy for the winning jockey as well."

I nodded, and went in to sit on the scales. I felt appallingly weak and tired, and the pain in my wrists had increased to the point where I was finding it very difficult to keep it out of my face.

When I got outside again the horses had been led away and in their place stood a table bearing the Midwinter Cup and other trophies, with a bunch of race-course directors and stewards beside it.

And Maurice Kemp-Lore as well. It was lucky I saw him before he saw me. I felt a strong shock of revulsion run right down my body. He couldn't have failed to understand it, if he had seen it. I found James at my elbow. He followed my gaze.

"Why are you looking so grim?" he said. "He didn't even try to dope Template. He must have seen there was no chance any more of persuading anyone you had lost your nerve. Not after the way you rode Turniptop on Thursday."

It was the reckless way I had ridden on Thursday that had infuriated Kemp-Lore into delivering the packet I had taken on Friday. "Have you told anyone about the sugar?" I asked.

"No, since you asked me not to. But I think something must be done, evidence or not"

"Will you wait," I asked, "until next Saturday? A week today? Then you can tell whoever you like."

"Very well," he said slowly. "But I still think"

He was interrupted by the presentation of the Midwinter Cup to Lord Tirrold, a silver tray to James, and a cigarette box to me.

When the ceremony was over I heard Kemp-Lore's voice behind me and it gave me time to arrange my face before turning slowly round and meeting his eyes. They were piercingly blue and very cold, and they didn't blink or alter in any way as I looked back at them. I relaxed

a little, thankful that the first difficult hurdle was crossed. He had searched, but had not read in my face that I knew it was he who had abducted me the evening before.

"Rob Finn is the jockey you just watched being carried to victory by this wonder horse, Template," he said in his charming television voice. Then he turned to me. "I expect you enjoyed being his passenger, Rob?"

"It was marvellous," I said emphatically, smiling a smile to outdazzle his. "It is a great thrill for any jockey to ride a horse as superb as Template. Of course," I went on before he had time to speak, "I am lucky to have had the opportunity. As you know, I have been taking Pip Pankhurst's place while his leg has been mending, and today's win should have been his. He is much better now, and we are all delighted that it won't be long before he is riding again."

A silent chill crept into the corner of Kemp-Lore's mouth. "You haven't been doing as well, lately . . ." he began.

"No," I interrupted warmly. "Aren't they extraordinary, those runs of atrocious luck in racing? Did you know that the great Doug Smith once rode ninety-nine losers in succession? It makes my twenty or so seem quite paltry."

"You weren't worried, then, by . . . er . . . by such a bad patch as you've been going through?" His smile was slipping.

"Well, naturally I wasn't exactly delighted, but these runs of bad luck happen to everyone in racing, and one just has to live through them until another winner comes along. Like today's," I finished, with a grin at the camera.

"Most people understood it was more than bad luck," he said sharply, and for an instant I saw a flash of fury in his eyes.

I said, "People will believe anything when their pockets are touched. I'm afraid a lot of people lost their money backing my mounts . . . it's only natural to blame the jockey when they lose."

He listened to me mending the holes he had torn in my life and he couldn't stop me without giving an impression of being a bad sport. He had been standing with his profile to the camera, but now he took a step towards me and turned so that he stood beside me.

As he moved he dropped his arm heavily across my shoulders, with

his fingers spread out on my back in a gesture which must have appeared one of genuine friendship on the television screen. I stood still, and turned my head slowly towards him, and smiled. Few efforts have ever cost me more.

"And what are Template's plans for the future?" He strove to be conversational, normal, but there was an expression of puzzlement in his eyes. His arm felt like a ton weight on my aching muscles; I gathered my straying wits. "There's the Gold Cup at Cheltenham in three weeks time."

"And you hope to ride him again in that?" he asked. There was an edge to his voice which stopped just short of offensiveness.

"It depends," I said, "on whether or not Pip is fit in time. . . . Of course I'd like to, if I get the chance."

"You've never yet managed to ride in the Gold Cup, I believe?" He made it sound as if I had been trying unsuccessfully for years to beg a mount.

"No," I agreed. "But it has only been run twice since I came into racing, so if I get a ride in it so soon in my career I'll count myself very lucky."

His nostrils flared and I thought in satisfaction, "That got you squarely in the guts, my friend."

Kemp-Lore was speaking now towards the camera, finishing off his broadcast. He gave me a last, natural-looking little squeezing shake, and let his arm drop away from my shoulders. I silently repeated to myself the ten most obscene words I knew, and after that, Ascot racecourse stopped attempting to whirl round.

Kemp-Lore turned directly to me again and said, "Well, that's it. We're off the air now."

"Thank you, Maurice," I said carefully, constructing one last warm smile. "That was just what I needed to set me back on top of the world. A big race win and a television interview with you to clinch it. Thank you very much."

He gave me a look in which the cultivated habit of charm struggled for supremacy over spite, and still won. Then he turned on his heel and walked away.

It is impossible to say which of us loathed the other more.

CHAPTER XIII

I SPENT most of the next day in Joanna's bed. She gave me a cup of coffee for breakfast, a cosy grin, and instructions to sleep.

I had arrived in a shaky condition on her doorstep the evening before, having first taken Tick-Tock by taxi to the White Bear at Uxbridge where, as I had imagined, the Mini-Cooper stood abandoned in the car park.

My wrist-watch and wallet were on the glove shelf, and my jacket and overcoat on the back seat.

"Why the blazes," Tick-Tock said slowly, "did you leave your things here? It's a wonder they weren't pinched. And the car."

He picked up the coats, and transferred them to the waiting taxi. "You may have fooled everyone else today, mate," he said lightly, "but to me you've looked like death warmed up, and it's something to do with your hands . . . the gloves are new . . . you don't usually wear any. What happened?"

"You work on it," I said amiably, getting back into the taxi.

The taxi driver, in a good mood because he had backed three winners, drove me back to Joanna's flat. I paid him and added a fat tip on top.

"Did you back a winner, too, then?" he asked.

"Yes. Template."

"Funny thing that," he said. "I backed him myself, after what you said. You were quite right; that fellow Finn's not washed up at all, not by a long chalk. He rode a hell of a race. I reckon he can carry my money again, any day." He selected a gear, and drove off.

JOANNA WAS singing quietly at her easel when I surfaced finally at about four o'clock the following afternoon. I sat up in bed. "Joanna, I'm starving," I said.

"All right. I'll cook."

And cook she did: fried chicken with sweet corn and pineapple and bacon. While the preliminary smells wafted tantalizingly out of the kitchen I put my clothes on, and changed her bed, making it fresh and neat for her to get into.

She carried a tray in from the kitchen and saw the bundle of dirty sheets and the smooth bed. "What are you doing?"

"The sofa isn't good for you," I said.

"So you are not sleeping here tonight?"

"No."

"You could try the sofa," she said. "You might as well find out what I have endured for your sake." I didn't answer at once, and she added compulsively, "Stay, Rob. I'd like you to."

I looked at her carefully. Was there the slightest chance, I wondered, that her reluctance to have me leave meant that she was at last finding the fact of our cousinship less troublesome? If so, it was definitely not the time to walk out. "All right," I said smiling. "Thank you. I'll stay."

She became suddenly animated and talkative, and told me in great detail how the race and the interview had appeared on television. "You looked like lifelong buddies standing there with his arm round your shoulders and you smiling at him. How did you manage it?" She stopped in mid-flow, and in a sober tone of voice she said, "What are you going to do about him?"

I told her. It took some time. Then I asked, "Will you help?" Her help was essential.

She was shaken. "But what you are planning . . . it's cruel and complicated, and expensive. Won't you change your mind and go to the police instead?"

"No. Will you make that one telephone call for me?"

She sighed. "All right," she said. "I'll do it. You can go ahead with . . . with what you plan to do."

ON THE following morning I hired a drive-yourself car and went to see Grant Oldfield.

When I rang the bell it struck me that the brass bell push was brightly polished. The door opened and a neat, dark-haired young woman looked at me inquiringly.

"I came . . ." I said. "I wanted to see . . . er . . . I wonder if you could tell me where I can find Grant Oldfield?"

"Indoors," she said. "I'm his wife. What name shall I say?"

"Rob Finn," I said.

"Oh," she said, and smiled warmly. "Do come in."

I stepped into the narrow hall and she led the way to the kitchen. Everything was spotless. Grant was sitting at a table, reading a newspaper. When he saw me his face, too, creased into a smile of welcome. He looked much older and shrunken, but a whole man again.

"How are you, Grant?" I said inadequately.

"I'm much better, thanks. I've been home a fortnight now."

"He was in the hospital," his wife explained. "Dr. Parnell wrote to me and told me Grant was ill and couldn't help being how he was. So I came back." She smiled at Grant. "And everything's going to be all right now. Grant's got a job lined up selling toys. They thought it would be better for him to do something which had nothing to do with horses."

"Grant," I said, "I believe you were telling the truth when you told Axminster you had not sold information to that professional backer, Lubbock. But Lubbock did pay for and get information. The question is, who was receiving the money?"

"I went to see Lubbock," Grant said, "and he said that until James Axminster tackled him about it, he hadn't known for sure who he was buying information from. He had only guessed it was me. But he said I had given him the information over the telephone and he had sent the payments to me in the name of Robinson, care of a post office in London."

"Can you give me Lubbock's address?" I asked.

"He lives in Solihull," he said slowly, "I can't remember the exact address."

"I'll find it," I said. "Would it mean anything to you if I proved that you were telling the truth all along?"

His face came suddenly alive. "I'll say it would. You can't imagine what it was like, losing that job for something I didn't do."

I didn't tell him that I knew exactly what it was like, only too well. I said, "I'll do my best, then."

I DROVE the thirty miles to Solihull, looked up Lubbock in the telephone directory, and rang his number. A woman answered. She told me he was lunching at the Queen's Hotel.

Mr. Lubbock proved to be a plumpish, middle-aged man with a gingery moustache. I introduced myself and ordered him a brandy and a cigar. Then I came straight to the point. "I want to know about Grant Oldfield."

He gave me a sharp glance. "Do you want a deal, is that it? Well, for every winner you put me on to, I'll pay you the same as I paid Oldfield."

"Did you pay the money to him personally?" I asked.

"No," he said. "He fixed it up on the telephone. He was very secretive: said his name was Robinson, and asked me to send money orders to a post office for him to collect."

"You didn't know for sure it was Oldfield, did you?" I asked.

"It depends what you mean by know," he said. "Who else could it have been? But I suppose I didn't actually know until Axminster said 'I hear you've been buying information from my jockey.' "

"So you wouldn't have told anyone before that it was Oldfield who was selling you tips?"

"Of course not." He gave me a hard stare. "You don't broadcast things like that in my business. Just what is all this about?"

"Well . . ." I said. "I'm very sorry to have misled you, Mr. Lubbock, but I am not really trying to sell you tips, I'm just trying to unstick a bit of mud that was thrown at Grant Oldfield."

To my surprise he gave a fat chuckle. "Do you know," he said, "if you'd agreed to tip me off I'd have been looking for the catch?" He jabbed his cigar in my direction. "You aren't the type."

"Thanks." I grinned. "Mr. Lubbock," I said, "Oldfield was not Robinson, but his career and his health were broken up because you and Mr. Axminster were led to believe that he was. Oldfield has now given up riding, but it would still mean a great deal to him to have his name cleared. Will you help to do it?"

"How?" he said.

"Would you just write a statement to the effect that you saw no evidence at any time to support your guess that in paying Robinson you were really paying Oldfield, and that at no time before James Axminster approached you did you speak of your suspicions as to Robinson's identity?"

"That can't do any harm," he said. "But I think you're barking up the wrong tree. Only a jockey would go to all that trouble to hide his identity. Still, I'll write what you ask."

He took a sheet of hotel writing paper and wrote and signed the statement. "There you are," he said.

I read what he had written and put it in my wallet. "Thank you very much, Mr. Lubbock, for your help," I said and stood up.

"Any time." He waved his cigar. "See you at the races."

CHAPTER XIV

ON TUESDAY morning I bought a copy of *Horse and Hound* and telephoned a farmer who had advertised a hunter for sale. I made an appointment to view the animal in two days time. Next I rang up one of the farmers I rode for and persuaded him to lend me his Land-Rover and trailer on Thursday. Then, having borrowed a tape measure from Joanna, I drove down to James's stables. I found him sitting in his office. When I entered he stood up and rubbed his hands, and then held them out to the fire. "Some of the owners have telephoned," he said. "They're willing to have you back. I told them . . ." and he smiled ". . . that you would be on Template in the Gold Cup."

"What!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean it? What about Pip?"

"I've explained to Pip," he said, "that I can't take you off the horse when you've won both the King Chase and the Midwinter on him. I have arranged with him that he starts again the week after Cheltenham, which will give him time to get a few races in before the Grand National. He'll be riding my runner in that. I've enough horses to keep both Pip and you fairly busy."

"I don't know how to thank you," I said.

"Thank yourself," he said sardonically. "You earned it."

"James," I said, "will you write something for me? That it was Kemp-Lore who told you that Oldfield was selling information about your horses, and that he said he had learned it from Lubbock?"

"I don't see" He gave me an intent look and shrugged. "Oh, very well." He sat down at his desk and wrote what I had asked. "What good will that do?" he said, handing it to me.

I showed him Mr. Lubbock's paper.

"It's incredible," he said. "Suppose I had checked carefully with Lubbock? What a risk Maurice took."

"It wasn't so big a risk," I said. "You wouldn't have thought of questioning what he put forward as a friendly warning."

"I wish there was something I could do about Grant," James said.

"Write to him and explain," I suggested. "He would appreciate it more than anything."

"I'll do that," he said.

"On Saturday morning," I said, "these little documents will arrive with a plop on the senior steward's doormat. They should be conclusive enough to kick friend Kemp-Lore off his pedestal."

"I should say you were right." He looked at me gravely, and then said, "Why wait until Saturday?"

"I . . . er . . . I won't be ready until then," I said evasively.

BACK IN the hills a mile or so away from his stable, James owned an old deserted keeper's cottage. After leaving him I drove up there. The cottage was set in a small fenced garden. The neglected grass had been cropped short by sheep. There were two windows facing the front and two the back. The whole place smelt faintly musty, but the walls and floorboards were still in good condition. It could not have been more convenient for my purpose.

I took out Joanna's tape and measured a window frame. Then I counted the number of broken panes of glass and measured one of them. That done, I drove into Newbury, and at a builder's merchants I ordered ten panes of glass, enough putty to put them in with, several pieces of water pipe cut to a specified length, a bucket, some screws, a stout padlock, a bag of ready-mix cement, a pot of green paint and various tools. Then I returned to the cottage. I painted the weather-beaten front door and left it open to dry. I went into one of the back rooms and knocked out the panes of glass which remained. Then I mixed a good quantity of cement, using water from the rain barrel, and fixed six three-foot lengths of pipe upright in a row across the window. That done, I fitted the padlock to the door of the same room. On the inside of the door I unscrewed the handle and removed it.

The final job was replacing the glass in the front windows and when it was done, with its whole windows and fresh green door, the cottage already looked more cheerful and welcoming.

I smiled to myself and drove back to London.

ON WEDNESDAY morning I went to a photographic agency and asked to see a picture of Kemp-Lore's sister, Alice. I bought a copy of a photograph which showed her as a striking girl watching some hunter trials, dressed in a riding jacket and head scarf.

Leaving the agency, I went to the offices of my parents' accountants, and talked the manager into letting me use a typewriter and a photo-copying machine.

I typed a bald account of Kemp-Lore's actions against Grant Oldfield. I made ten copies of this statement and then on the photo-copier printed ten copies each of the statements from Lubbock and James. I then returned to Joanna's and showed her the photograph of Alice Kemp-Lore.

"But," said Joanna, " she isn't a bit like her brother. It can't have been her that the ticket collector saw at Cheltenham."

"No," I said. "It was Kemp-Lore himself. Could you draw me a picture of him wearing a head scarf?"

"I've only seen him on television," she said, but with concentration she made a recognizable likeness. "It isn't very good." She began to sketch in a head scarf over the forehead, then she emphasized the lips so that they looked dark and full.

"Lipstick," she explained. "How about clothes?"

"Jodhpurs and riding jacket," I said. "The only clothes which look equally right on men and women."

She drew in a collar and tie and the shoulders of a jacket. The portrait grew into a likeness of a pretty girl dressed for riding. It made my skin crawl.

I filled ten long envelopes with the various statements. I addressed one to the senior steward and four others to influential people on the National Hunt Committee. One to the chairman of Universal Telecast, one each to John Ballerton and Corin Kellar, to show them their idol's clay feet. One to James. And one to Maurice Kemp-Lore.

I stacked nine of the envelopes on the bookshelf and propped the

tenth, the one for Kemp-Lore, up on end behind them. "We'll post that lot on Friday," I said. "And I'll deliver the other one myself."

AT EIGHT THIRTY on Thursday morning Joanna made the telephone call upon which so much depended.

I dialled Kemp-Lore's flat for her. We had rehearsed what she was going to say. Joanna looked at me anxiously.

"Oh? Mr. Kemp-Lore?" She could do a beautiful cockney-suburban accent. "You don't know me, but I wondered if I could tell you something that you could use on your programme in the newsy bits at the end? I do admire your programme. It's ever so good"

His voice clacked, interrupting the flow.

"What information?" repeated Joanna. "Oh, well, you know all the talk there's been about athletes using them pep pills, well I wondered if you wanted to know about jockeys doing it too . . . one jockey, actually Which jockey? Oh . . . er . . . Robbie Finn, you know, the one you talked to on the telly on Saturday. Pepped to the eyebrows as usual he was, didn't you guess? How do I know? Well, it was me got some stuff for him once. I work in a doctor's dispensary in Newbury . . . he told me what to take and I got it for him. But now look here, I don't want to get into no trouble that . . . I think I'd better ring off Don't ring off? You won't say nothing about it then, you know, me pinching the stuff?

"Why am I telling you? . . . Well, he don't come to see me no more, that's why." Her voice was superbly loaded with jealous spite. "After all I've done for him Check, what do you mean check? . . . You can't take my word for it on the telephone? Well, yes, you can come and see me if you want to . . . no, not today, I'm at work all day . . . yes, all right, tomorrow morning then.

"How do you get there? . . . Well, you go to Newbury and then out towards Hungerford" She went on with the directions slowly while he wrote them down. "And it's the only cottage along there, you can't miss it. About eleven o'clock? All right then. What's my name? . . . Doris Jones Well, ta-ta then."

She put the receiver down slowly, looking at me with a serious face. "Hook, line and sinker," she said.

WHEN THE banks opened I drew out £150. As Joanna had said, what I was doing was complicated and expensive; but I grudged the money not at all. What I wanted was to pay Kemp-Lore in his own coin.

I hired a car and drove off to Bedfordshire to collect the Land-Rover and trailer from my farmer friend. I bought from him two bales of straw and one of hay, and then I started away to my appointment with the man with the hunter for sale.

My appointment proved to be with an old brown mare, sound in limb but noisy in wind. She was big, but quiet to handle. I got her for £85. Then I loaded the mare, whose name was Buttonhook, into the trailer and turned my face south again to Berkshire.

Three hours later I turned the Land-Rover into the lane at the cottage, and bumped Buttonhook to a standstill on the rough ground behind the bushes beyond the building. While she waited in the trailer I spread the straw thickly over the floorboards in the room with the water pipes cemented over the window, filled her a bucket of water out of the rain barrel and carried an armful of hay into a corner of the room.

She was an affectionate old thing. She came docilely out of the trailer, in through the front door of the cottage and into the room prepared for her. I gave her some sugar and rubbed her ears, and she butted her head playfully against my chest. After a while, as she seemed quite content, I padlocked her in.

I dumped the rest of the hay and straw in one of the front rooms of the cottage, shut the front door, and set off to deliver the Land-Rover and trailer to their owner. Then I drove the hired car back to Joanna's flat.

When I went in she sprang up from the sofa and kissed me. It was utterly spontaneous, and it was a surprise to both of us. I smiled incredulously into her black eyes, and watched the surprise there turn to confusion. I turned my back on her to give her time, saying casually over my shoulder, "The lodger is installed in the cottage. A big brown mare with a nice nature."

"I was just . . . glad to see you back," she said in a high voice.

"That's fine," I said lightly. "Can we rustle up an egg?"

She made an omelette for me and I told her about Buttonhook, and the difficult moment passed.

Later on she announced that she was coming down to the cottage with me in the morning. "He's expecting Doris Jones to open the door to him. It will be much better if she does."

I couldn't budge her.

"And," she said, "I don't suppose you've thought of putting curtains in the windows? If you want him to walk into your parlour, you'll have to make it look normal. He probably has a keen nose for smelling rats." She collected pins and scissors and some printed cotton material and then rolled up the big rag rug which the easel stood on and took a flower picture off the wall.

"What are those for?" I said.

"To furnish the hall, of course. It's got to look right."

"O.K., genius," I said, giving in. "You can come."

CHAPTER XV

We set off early and got down to the cottage before nine. I hid the car behind the bushes again, and we carried the rug and the other things inside. Buttonhook was delighted to see us. I fetched her some more hay and water, and Joanna cut and pinned up the flowery material so that it hung like curtains. After I had finished with Buttonhook, leaving the door to her room companionably open, and Joanna had put down the rug in the little hall and hung up the picture, we stood back and admired our handiwork. With its freshly painted front door, pretty curtains, and the rug and picture showing through the half-open door, the cottage looked well cared for and homely. My watch said twenty minutes to eleven. "We'd better get ready in case he comes early," I said.

We shut the front door and sat on the remains of the hay bale in the front room, giving ourselves a clear view of the front gate. A minute or two ticked by in silence. Joanna shivered.

"Are you too cold?" I said with concern.

"It's nerves as much as cold," she said, shivering again.

I put my arm round her shoulders. She leaned comfortably against

me, and I kissed her cheek. Her eyelids flickered, but she didn't move. I had a sudden feeling that if I lost this time I had lost for ever, and a chill of despair settled in my stomach.

"No one forbids marriage between cousins," I said slowly. "The law allows it and the Church allows it, and you can be sure they wouldn't if there were anything immoral in it. And the medical profession raises no objection either." I paused, but she still said nothing. Without much hope I said, "I don't really understand why you feel the way you do."

"It's instinct," she said. "I've always thought of it as wrong . . . and impossible."

There was a little silence. I said, "I think I'll sleep in my digs tonight, and ride out with the horses tomorrow morning. I've been neglecting my job this week. . . ."

She sat up straight, pulling free of my arm. "No," she said abruptly. "Come back to the flat."

"I can't. I can't any more," I said. "I can't go on like this if you know beyond any doubt that you'll never change your mind."

"Before last week-end there wasn't any problem as far as I was concerned," she said. "You were just something I couldn't have . . . like oysters, which give me indigestion And now"—she tried to laugh—"it's as if I've developed a craving for oysters."

"Come here," I said persuasively. She moved close beside me on the hay bale. I took her hand.

"If we weren't cousins, would you marry me?" I held my breath.

"Yes," she said simply. No reservations, no hesitation any more.

I turned towards her and put my hands on the sides of her head and tilted her face up. I kissed her, gently, and with love. Her lips trembled.

"It will be all right," I said. "Our being cousins won't worry you in a little while."

She looked at me wonderingly for a moment. "I believe you," she said, "because I've never known anyone more determined in all my life. You don't care what trouble you put yourself to to get what you want . . . like riding in the race last Saturday, and fixing up this cottage, and living with me as you have this week . . . so my instinct

against blood relatives marrying would have to start getting used to the idea that it isn't wrong. I will try," she finished seriously, "not to keep you waiting very long."

"In that case," I said, "I'll go on sleeping on your sofa as often as possible, so as to be handy when the breakthrough occurs."

She laughed and we went on sitting on the hay bale, talking calmly as if nothing had happened; and nothing had, I thought, except a miracle that one could reliably build a future on.

The minutes ticked away towards eleven. I closed Buttonhook's door now, leaving the padlock undone.

"I almost hope he doesn't come," she said. "Those letters would be enough by themselves."

"You won't forget to post them when you get back?" I said.

"Of course not. But I wish you'd let me stay."

I shook my head. We sat on, watching the gate. The minute hand passed the hour on my watch.

"He's late," she said.

Five past eleven. Ten past eleven.

"He isn't coming," Joanna murmured.

"He'll come," I said. "He clearly didn't know at the end of that television interview with me last Saturday that I was on to him. If he feels as secure as I am sure he does, he'll never pass up an opportunity to learn about something as damaging as pep pills . . . so he'll come."

A quarter past eleven. Twenty past eleven. Eleven thirty. She said again, "He isn't coming."

I didn't answer.

At eleven thirty-three, the sleek nose of an Aston Martin slid to a stop at the gate and Maurice Kemp-Lore stepped out. He wore a beautifully cut riding jacket and cavalry twill trousers, and there was poise and grace in his every movement.

"Glory, he's handsome," breathed Joanna in my ear. "Television doesn't do him justice."

Kemp-Lore banged the knocker on the front door.

Joanna gave me a half-smile, and walked unhurriedly into the hall. I followed her and stood against the wall where I would be hidden when the door opened. She opened the door.



"Doris Jones?" the honey voice said. "I'm so sorry I'm late."

"Won't you come in, Mr. Kemp-Lore," said Joanna in her cockney-suburban accent. "It's ever so nice to see you."

"Thank you," he said, stepping over the threshold. Joanna took two paces backward and Kemp-Lore followed her into the hall.

Slamming the front door with my foot, I seized Kemp-Lore from behind by both elbows, forcing him forward at the same time. Joanna opened the door of Buttonhook's room and I brought my foot up

into the small of Kemp-Lore's back and gave him an almighty push. He staggered forward through the door and I had a glimpse of him sprawling face downward in the straw before I had the door shut again and the padlock firmly clicking into place.

"That was easy," I whispered with satisfaction. "Thanks to you."

Kemp-Lore began kicking the door. "Let me out," he shouted. "What do you think you're doing?"

"He didn't see you," said Joanna softly.

"No," I agreed. "I think we'll leave him in ignorance while I take you to Newbury to catch the train."

Before leaving I moved Kemp-Lore's car until it was hidden in the bushes. Then I took Joanna to the station and drove straight back again.

Walking quietly I went round to the back of the cottage. Kemp-Lore's hands gripped the water-pipe bars in the window. He was shaking them vigorously. He stopped abruptly when he saw me and the anger in his face changed to blank surprise.

"Who did you expect?" I said.

"I don't know what's going on," he said. "Some damn fool of a woman locked me in here nearly an hour ago and went away and left me. You can let me out. Quickly." His breath wheezed sharply in his throat. "There's a horse in here," he said, looking over his shoulder, "and they give me asthma."

"Yes," I said steadily, without moving, "I know."

It hit him then. His eyes widened. "It was you . . . who pushed me. . . ."

"Yes," I said.

He stood staring at me through the criss-cross of window frame and bars. "You did it on purpose? You put me in here with a horse on purpose?" His voice rose. "Why?"

"I'll give you half an hour to think about it," I said.

"No," he exclaimed. "My asthma's bad. Let me out at once." His breath whistled fiercely, but he had not even loosened his collar and tie. He was in no danger.

"Stand by the window," I said, "and breathe the fresh air."

"It's cold," he objected. "This place is like an ice-box."

I smiled. "Maybe it is," I said. "But then you are fortunate . . . you can move about to keep warm, and you have your jacket on, and I have not poured two bucketfuls of cold water over your head."

He gasped and it was then, I think, that he began to realize that he was not going to escape easily.

When I walked round to the window after listening to him kicking the door for half an hour, I found him fending off Buttonhook, who was putting her muzzle affectionately over his shoulder. He was nearly choking with rage and fear. "Get her away from me," he screamed. "She won't leave me alone. I can't breathe."

He clung on to a bar with one hand and chopped at Buttonhook with the other. His asthma was much worse. He had unbuttoned his collar and pulled down his tie and I could see his throat heaving.

I put the box of sugar cubes I was carrying on the inner window-sill, withdrawing my hand quickly as he made a grab at it. "Put some sugar on her hay," I said. "Go on," I added, as he hesitated. "This lot isn't doped."

His head jerked up. I looked bitterly into his eyes. "Twenty-eight horses," I said. "Starting with Shantytown. Twenty-eight sleepy horses who all ate some of your sugar before they raced."

"You won't get away with this," he said. "You'll go to jail for it." His breath hissed. "Now, hurry up and say whatever it is you want to say. You'll have to let me out by two thirty at the latest," he said unguardedly. "I've got rehearsals today at five."

I smiled and said, "It's no accident that you are here on Friday."

His jaw literally dropped. "The programme . . ." he said.

"Will have to go on without you," I agreed.

"But you can't," he shouted, gasping, "you can't do that. Millions of people are expecting to see the programme."

"Then millions of people are going to be disappointed," I said.

He stopped shouting and took three gulping, wheezing breaths. "If you let me go in good time for the rehearsals, I won't report you to the police as I threatened."

"I think you had better keep quiet and listen," I said. "I suppose you find it hard to realize that I don't give a damn for your influence or your dazzling, synthetic personality. You are a fraud, a sick mess of

envy and frustration and spite. But I wouldn't have found you out if you hadn't doped twenty-eight horses I rode and told everyone I had lost my nerve. And you can spend this afternoon reflecting that you wouldn't be missing your programme tonight if you hadn't tried to stop me from riding Template."

He stood stock-still, his face pallid. "No," he said. A muscle in his cheek twitched. "No. You can't. You did ride Template . . . you must let me do the programme."

"You won't be doing any more programmes," I said. "Not tonight or any night. I didn't bring you here just for a personal revenge. I brought you here on behalf of Art Mathews and Peter Cloony and Grant Oldfield, Danny Higgs and Ingersoll, and every other jockey you have hit where it hurts. In various ways you saw to it that they lost their jobs; so now you are going to lose yours."

For the first time, he was speechless. His lower jaw hung slack. I took the long envelope addressed to him out of my pocket and handed it to him through the bars. "Open it," I said.

He pulled out the sheets of paper and read them. His face showed from the first that he understood the extent of the disaster.

"As you will see," I said, "those are photostat copies. More like them are in the post to the senior steward and to your boss at Universal Telecast, and to several other people as well. They will get them tomorrow morning. And they will no longer wonder why you failed to turn up for your programme tonight."

He still seemed unable to speak. I passed to him the rolled-up portrait Joanna had drawn of him. He opened it, and it was clearly another blow.

"I brought it to show you," I said, "so that you would realize beyond any doubt that I know exactly what you were doing when you rammed that old Jaguar across Peter Cloony's lane."

His head jerked, as if still surprised that I knew so much.

"Most of your vicious rumours," I said, changing tack, "were spread for you by Corin Kellar and John Ballerton. I hope you know Corin well enough to realize that he never stands by his friends. When the contents of the letter he will receive in the morning sink into that rat-brain of his, and he finds that other people have had letters like it,

there won't be anyone spewing out more damaging truth about you than him.

"You see," I finished after a pause, "I think it is only justice that as far as possible you should suffer exactly what you inflicted on other people."

He spoke at last. "How did you find it out?" he wheezed disbelievingly. "You didn't know last Friday, you couldn't see. . . ."

"I did know last Friday," I said. "I knew just how far you had gone to smash Peter Cloony, and I knew you hated me enough to give yourself asthma doping my mounts. I knew all about your curdled, obsessive jealousy of jockeys. I didn't need to see you . . . there wasn't anyone else with any reason to want me out of action."

"You can't have known all that," he said obstinately. "You didn't know the next day when I interviewed you after the race" His voice trailed off in a croak.

"You aren't the only one who can smile and hate at the same time," I said neutrally. "I learned it from you."

I walked away, round the cottage and in at the front door, and sat down on the hay in the front room. I looked at my watch. It was a quarter to two. The afternoon stretched lengthily ahead.

Kemp-Lore had another spell of screaming for help; then he tried the door again, but it was too solidly constructed for him to kick his way through. Buttonhook grew restive from the noise and started pawing the ground, and Kemp-Lore shouted at me furiously to let him out.

The slow hours passed. At about five o'clock he was quiet for a long time. I got up and walked round the outside of the cottage and looked in through the window. He was lying face down in the straw near the door, not moving.

I watched him for a few minutes and called his name, but as he still did not stir I began to be alarmed, and decided I would have to make sure he was all right. I returned to the hall, and unlocked the padlock on the back room. The door swung inward.

Kemp-Lore was alive, that at least was plain. The sound of his high, squeezed breath rose from his still form. I bent down beside him to see into just how bad a spasm he had been driven, but as soon as I was

down on one knee he heaved himself up, knocking me sprawling, and sprang for the door. I caught his shoe and yanked him back. He fell heavily on top of me and we rolled towards Buttonhook. The mare was frightened. She cowered against the wall to get out of our way, but it was a small room and our struggles took us among Buttonhook's feet. She stepped gingerly over us and made for the open door.

Kemp-Lore's left hand was clamped round my right wrist. He couldn't have struck on anything better calculated to cause me inconvenience. I hit him in the face and neck with my left hand, but I was too close to get any weight behind it. He tried lacing his fingers in my hair and banging my head against the wall. He was staggeringly strong, in view of his asthma, and the desperation which fired him blazed in his blue eyes like a furnace. If my hair hadn't been so short he would probably have succeeded in knocking me out, but his fingers kept slipping and I managed at last to wrench my right hand free.

I landed a socking right jab in his ribs, and the air screeched out of his lungs. He went a sick grey-green colour and fell off me, gasping and clawing his throat for air. I got to my feet and hauled him up, and staggered with him over to the window, holding him where the fresh cold air blew into his face. After three or four minutes his colour improved and the terrifying heaving lessened. I clamped his fingers round the bars in the window and let go of him. He swayed a bit, but his hands held, and I walked dizzily out of the room and padlocked the door shut behind me.

Buttonhook had found her way into the front room and was placidly eating the hay. I leaned weakly against the wall and cursed myself for the foolish way I had nearly got myself locked into my own prison.

There was no sound from the back room. I walked round to the window. He was standing there, holding on to the bars where I had put him, and there were tears running down his cheeks. "Damn you," he said. Another tear spilt over. "Damn you. Damn you."

There wasn't anything to say. I went back to Buttonhook, and put on her halter. Leading her out of the front door and through the gate, I jumped on to her back and rode her along a lane which gave into a field owned by a farmer I had often ridden for. I opened the gate, led her through and turned her loose.

She was so amiable that I was sorry to part with her, but I frankly didn't know what else to do with her. I fed her a handful of sugar. Then I slapped her on the rump and watched my eighty-five quid kick up her heels and canter down the field like a two-year-old. The farmer would no doubt be surprised to find an unclaimed brown mare on his land, but I hadn't any doubt that he would give her a good home.

I turned away and walked back to the cottage. It was beginning to get dark, and I walked softly through the garden to the back window. He was still standing there. When he saw me he said quite quietly, "Let me out."

I shook my head.

I went round into the front room and sat down again on the hay. It was a quarter past six. Still three hours to wait: three hours in which the awful truth would slowly dawn on Kemp-Lore's colleagues in the television studio, three hours of stop-gap planning, culminating in the digging out of a bit of old film to fill in the empty fifteen minutes and the smooth announcement, "We regret that owing to the—er—illness of Maurice Kemp-Lore there will be no 'Turf Talk' tonight."

Or ever again, mates, I thought, if you did but know it.

It grew dark. Kemp-Lore began kicking the door again. "I'm cold," he shouted. "Let me out."

I made no reply to him at all, and I heard him slither down the door as if exhausted and begin sobbing with frustration. I listened without emotion; for I had cried too, in the tack-room.

The hands crawled round the face of my watch. At a quarter to nine, when nothing could any longer save his programme, I got stiffly to my feet and went out into the front garden. I walked along to the bushes and started Kemp-Lore's car, turning it and driving it back to the gate. Then for the last time I walked round the cottage to talk to him through the window. He was standing there already. "My car," he said hysterically. "I heard the engine. You're going to drive away in my car and leave me."

I laughed. "No. You are going to drive it away yourself. As fast and as far as you like. If I were you, I'd drive to the nearest airport and fly off. No one is going to like you very much when they've read those letters in the morning, and it will be only a day or two before the

papers get on to it. As far as racing goes, your face is too well known in Britain for you to hide or change your name or get another job."

"You mean . . . I can go? Just go?" He sounded astounded.

"Just go," I said, nodding. "If you go quickly enough, you'll avoid the inquiry the stewards are bound to hold. You can get away to some helpful distant country where they don't know you, and you can start again from scratch."

He moaned and crashed his fists down on the window frame.

I went round into the cottage and unlocked the padlock and pushed open the door. He turned from the window and walked unsteadily through the door, passing me without a glance. He stumbled down the path to his car. I walked behind him.

He paused when he was sitting in his car, and with the door still open looked out at me. "You don't understand," he said, his voice shaking. "When I was a boy I wanted to be a jockey. I wanted to ride in the Grand National, like my father. And then there was this thing about falling off . . . I'd see the ground rushing past under my horse and there would be this terrible sort of pain, and I sweated until I could pull up and get off. And then I'd be sick."

His face twisted. Then he said suddenly, fiercely, "It made me feel good to see jockeys looking worried. I broke them up all right. It made me feel warm inside. Big."

He looked up at me with renewed rage, and his voice thickened venomously. "I hated you more than all the others. You rode too well for a new jockey and you were getting on too quickly. You took your strength for granted, and too many people were saying you'd be champion one day. . . .

"I waited for you to have a fall, and then I used the sugar. It worked. I felt ten feet tall, looking at your white face and listening to everyone sniggering about you. I watched you find out how it felt. I wanted to see you writhe when everyone you cared for said . . . like my father said to all his friends . . . that it was a pity about you, a pity you had no nerve . . . no nerve. . . ."

His voice died away, and his hollowed eyes were wide, unfocused, as if he were staring back into an unbearable past. I stood looking down at the wreck of what could have been a great man. All that

vitality, I thought; all that splendid talent wasted for the sake of hurting people who had not hurt him.

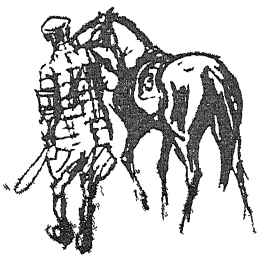
I could understand him in a way, I supposed, because I was myself the changeling in a family. But my father had rejected me kindly, and I felt no need to watch musicians suffer.

Without another word I shut the car door on him and gestured to him to drive away. He gave me one more incredulous glance as if he still found it impossible that I should let him go, and began to fumble with the light switches, the ignition and the gears. The car began to roll, and I caught a last glimpse of the famous profile as he slid away into the dark.

I walked up the path to the quiet cottage, to sweep it clean.

Forgiveness, I thought. That was something else again.

It would take a long time to forgive.



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